

## THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ENVY IN SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY: AN ANALYSIS OF SCHOLARLY PSYCHOLOGICAL PUBLICATIONS

Andrea CAPUTO

Specializing School of Health Psychology, University "Sapienza" of Rome  
Via Pescasseroli 6, 00177 Rome, Italy  
E-mail: caputo.and@libero.it

*Abstract:* This study explored the different conceptualizations of envy in scholarly psychological publications, in terms of cultural models shared in scientific community, which contribute to the social construction of this emotional experience. A text analysis based on social representation theory was conducted on a corpus of 450 abstracts consulted in PsycINFO Database and allowed the detection of five main representations of envy in psychological literature as primary destructiveness, subjective unfairness, narcissistic defense, competitive tendency and malicious joy. They are conceived along four latent dimensions respectively, regarding source (internal/external agency), function (self-development/other-derogation), self-awareness (low/high control) and legitimacy (moral/amoral values) of envy. The results highlight the psychoanalytic and psychosocial perspective about envy and its paradoxical function for social order.

*Key words:* envy, emotion, social representation theory, text analysis, scientific communication

Envy is a traditional concern of social science (Silver, Sabini, 1978). However, "despite the many plausible claims for the powerful influence of envy in everyday social interactions and for its role in shaping societal norms, psychological research on envy is only in its early stages" (Smith, Kim, 2007, p. 46). Envy is generally defined as a negative emotion that arises when a person lacks another's superior quality, achievement, or possession and either desires it or wishes that the other lacked it (Parrott, Smith, 1993). As well as shame, guilt or jealousy, envy is considered as a potentially problematic social emotion for both individual adjustment and interpersonal behavior (Tangney, Salovey, 1999). Indeed, it may lead to sacrifice one's own outcomes to diminish a competitor's relative advan-

tage (Berke, 1988; Parks, Rumble, Posey, 2002; Thernstrom, 1998; Zizzo, Oswald, 2001), criminal behavior (Schoeck, 1969) or ingroup biases (Glick, 2002; White et al., 2006). However, despite the fact that envy refers to a destructive and antisocial attitude, stigmatized in all cultures as a deadly sin, such a widespread feeling is also recognized as necessary to the existence of society, to its development and to the establishment of social relations (de Gaulejac, 1997). Indeed, according to an evolutionary perspective, envy may serve an important function in social competitions for access to resources that affect fitness (Alicke, Zell, 2008) and, although it often results in subjective distress, this type of emotional distress functions to motivate adaptive action (Buss, 1989; Hill, Buss, 2008).

In this regard, psychological literature highlights the complex nature of envy, depicted as an emotion, a reason for action, or a characterization of an action as a transgression of a moral order (Sabini, Silver, 1986), which can affect everyday life relating the concept to the social arena and social action (Clarke, 2004). Indeed, there is little agreement concerning the specifics of envy and several competing theoretical perspectives exist (i.e., psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology, social psychology) (Ninivaggi, 2010). Envy can be thus seen as a product of social construction (Silver, Sabini, 1978), which has sparked controversies in many fields including religion, philosophy, psychology, economics and politics. Because human emotions are socially constructed (Berger, Luckmann, 1966) and culturally embedded (Edwards, Potter, 1992), the representation of envy portrayed by scientific community thus tends to reproduce, as well as to be influenced by, moral norms, power relationships and cultural values shared in a wider social context (Quintanilla, Jensen de López, 2013).

From a methodological perspective, some critical issues emerge in current research, which concern a number of definitional challenges in operationalizing envy and its distinctive and consistent features. Some of these are semantic, and others stem from confusing associations with other emotions (Smith, Kim, 2007). For instance, in everyday use, the term envy is often confused with its more benign forms, which are closer to admiration and longing (Foster, 1972; Parrott, Smith, 1993; Silver, Sabini, 1978), despite - by proper definition and scholarly tradition - envy contains hostile feelings that can lead to hostile actions. Envy is also often confused with jealousy (Foster, 1972; Guerrero,

Andersen, 1998; Parrott, Smith, 1993; Silver, Sabini, 1978), because of its semantic overlap in the use of the term jealousy, the tendency for both emotions to co-occur, and the typically higher intensity of jealousy. But envy involves cases in which another person has what we want but cannot have, whereas jealousy involves the threat of losing someone to a rival. Finally, envy has especially complex associations with resentment, as many definitions incorporate some sense of injustice within the initial experience of envy and certainly as a common means of coping with the emotion (Smith, Kim, 2007). In addition, envy seems to have different roles in motivating various behavioral outputs because researchers have noted at least three categories of behaviors triggered by envy: submission, ambition, and destruction (Hill, Buss, 2008). Therefore, researchers widely recognize the usefulness of organizing existing bodies of knowledge about envy in order to explore different conceptualizations of envy. It allows them to make informed predictions about specific domains in which individuals are expected to experience envy (Hill, Buss, 2008).

#### *Theoretical Framework and Research Question*

This study aims at exploring the different conceptualizations of envy that are proposed in scholarly psychological publications. It is hypothesized that the analysis of literature about a specific topic allows the detection of cultural meanings and symbolic components, which shape scientific knowledge about an object of investigation, in our case envy (Carli, Panaccia, 2002). According to a research paradigm based on the social representations theory (Moscovici, 1984), sci-

entific knowledge tends to be deemed a fundamental aspect of common sense and is integrated into a moral system, which regulates what is to be regarded as acceptable or unacceptable in a society. Indeed, meaning is created through a system of social negotiation from discursive productions, rather than being a fixed and defined thing (Moscovici, 1988, 2005). Social representations are complex and holistic. They may be seen as “theories”, “networks of ideas”, metaphors and images that include emotions, attitudes and judgments (Moscovici, 1988). They are, furthermore, embedded in communicative practices, such as dialogues, debates, media discourses and scientific discourses (Marková, 2003). In this sense, science and mass media have a fundamental role in the formation and communication of social representations through the rapid communication of ideas and images, because commonsense knowledge is directly related to how people interpret or translate the knowledge that is socially transmitted by means of public information system (Moscovici, Hewstone, 1983; Sommer, 1998).

As stated by Höijer (2010), *emotional anchoring* and *objectification* refer to communicative processes by which a new phenomenon is attached to well-known positive or negative emotions, for example fear or hope. In this way the unknown becomes recognizable as, for example, a threat, danger, or as something nice and pleasurable. Most emotions, for example, shame, guilt, envy, pride, grief, compassion, etc., are furthermore to be seen as socio-cultural products related to values and social norms of a society (Elster, 1999; Nussbaum, 2001). They can be studied as emotions of individuals or groups of individuals, but also as emotions of spoken, textual and visual

cultural products (Edwards, 1999). Emotions help people interpret and judge social situations and act suitably because good citizenship and democratic engagement are based on the capacity to feel (Marcus, 2002). Philosophers have also recently argued for the necessity of taking emotions seriously and integrating them in theories of moral thinking. For instance, Antonaccio (2001) argues that emotions are significant for ethics because they display the value-laden character of human consciousness. We may thus conclude that emotions are to be seen as cultural-cognitive products related to values and social norms of a society. In this perspective, psychological literature produced on envy suggests the symbolic connection established between social science and collusive symbolizations, in terms of cultural models, shared in wider community about this emotional experience.

## METHOD

### *Collection of Scholarly Psychological Publications*

For the research it was decided to consult PsycINFO Database, an electronic bibliographic source providing abstracts and citations to the scholarly international literature in the psychological, social, behavioral, and health sciences. The research was carried out on 30 October 2012, by inserting the keyword “envy” in the search engine, which retrieved all the publications containing this word in the title. A careful reading allowed us to select only the records focusing on the topic, discarding those in which “envy” was only mentioned or used in a metaphorical sense. Only records providing an abstract or a brief description (as in the case of books)

of publication contents were retained. The result was a sample of 450 publications produced between 1697 and 2012: 313 Journal Articles; 36 Dissertation Abstracts; 19 Books; 62 Book Chapters and 20 Other Publications (Review-Book, Comment-Reply, Erratum/Correction). Consistently with the research question, textual corpus was created using only abstracts (or brief descriptions), because they could concisely provide an immediate image of envy representation with clearest emphasis, thus resulting in a text of 85 pages.

### *Emotional Text Analysis*

Emotional Text Analysis (AET) (Carli, Panicea, 2002) is a psychological tool for the analysis of written texts that allows the exploration of specific cultural models structuring the text itself, thus outlining the “emotional construction of knowledge” of a certain research object, in our case envy. According to this methodology, emotions are not considered as individual responses but as shared categorization processes by which people symbolize the reality and are expressed through language, consistently with the social representation theory. AET allows to get a representation of textual corpus contents through few and significant thematic domains. It does not derive the internal structure of a corpus from ad hoc categories established by the researcher, but rather from the distribution of the words in the corpus itself, because the sense of a text can be represented in terms of its semantic variability. Analysis results can be considered as an isotopy (iso = same; topoi = places) map where each of them, as a generic or specific theme, is characterized by the co-occurrences of semantic traits. Isotopy refers to a meaning

conception as a “contextual effect”, that is something that does not belong to words considered one by one, but as a result of their relationships within texts or speeches. The isotopies function as help in understanding speeches (or texts); in fact, each of the isotopies detects a reference context shared among a number of words, which however does not result from their specific meanings. That is because the whole is something different from the summation of its parts. Isotopy detection, therefore, is not a simple “fact” observation, but the result of an interpretation process. As Hall (1997) argued, these “maps of meaning” reflect cultural models as frameworks for classifying the world according to some hierarchical value system and for ordering people’s lives. By cultural model we mean a motivational framework for representations that are intersubjectively shared by a social group within a specific context (in our case scientific community). According to AET, language does not only refer to individuals’ cognitive meanings, but it also expresses the emotional experience, which mediates social interactions, as well as practices that are culturally accepted. For instance, the cultural models of immigration do not exclusively account for the public image of the phenomenon; rather they deal with the collusive dynamics, such as affiliation, power or fear, regulating a wide range of aspects within a social system (i.e., school inclusion, labor market access, anti-racism policy, etc.).

The basic hypothesis of AET relies on the “double reference” principle - both lexical and symbolic - implicitly connected to the language text (Fornari, 1979). This allows one to capture the emotional and symbolic dimensions *running through* the text, apart from its intentional structuring or cognitive

sense. In this sense, with *polysemy*, we refer to the infinitive association of emotional meanings attributable to a word, when it is taken out of language context. Thus the words organizing the language sample can be divided into two large categories: *dense words*, with the maximum of polysemy, if taken alone, and the minimum of ambiguity in the sense of a contradictory, indefinite emotional configuration (i.e., words like “bomb” or “good”); *non-dense words*, with the maximum of sense ambiguity and thus with the minimum of polysemy (i.e., words like “to guess” or “anyway”). If dense words, which maintain a strong emotional meaning even when taken in isolation, are identified in a text, they can be grouped according to their co-occurrence in the same text segments, thus creating different symbolic repertoires.

#### *Analysis Procedures*

Consistently with AET framework, some analysis procedures (cluster analysis and correspondence analysis) were carried out on the text with the help of specific IT programs for text analysis, in our case the software was T-Lab (Lancia, 2004). This manages to obtain groups of words (clusters), which co-occur in the same set of text segments with the highest probability. Then, it allows the detection of the latent dimensions (factors), which define the semantic relationships between these groupings.

In more detail, the T-LAB tool we used for the analysis was the “Thematic analysis of elementary context” which transforms the textual corpus in a digital “presence-absence” matrix. To do that, each headline/sub-heading was considered as a segment of the corpus (namely, an elementary context unit)

and represented a row of the matrix, while all the words present in the corpus represented the columns of the matrix.

The analysis procedure consists of the following steps:

- a - construction of a data table context units x lexical units (up to 150,000 rows x 3,000 columns), with presence/absence values;
- b - normalization and scaling of row vectors to unit length (Euclidean norm);
- c - clustering of the context units (measure: cosine coefficient; method: bisecting K-means);
- d - filing of the obtained partitions and, for each of them;
- e - construction of a contingency table lexical units x clusters ( $n \times k$ );
- f - chi square test applied to all the intersections of the contingency table;
- g - correspondence analysis of the contingency table lexical units x clusters.

This procedure therefore performs a type of co-occurrence analysis (steps a-b-c) and, subsequently, a type of comparative analysis (steps e-f-g). In particular, comparative analysis uses the categories of the “new variable” derived from the co-occurrence analysis (categories of the new variable = thematic clusters) to form the contingency table columns.

Each cluster consists of a set of text segments characterized by the same patterns of keywords and can be described through the lexical units (lemmas) and the most characteristic context units (sentences) from which it is composed. Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) allows us to test the significance of a word recurrence within each cluster. The function of the co-occurrence of words in the same cluster is hypothesized to reduce the association of meanings attributable to each word (emotional polysemy), thus allowing a the-

matic domain to be constructed. These clusters of words, that we call *Cultural Repertoires*, can be considered as the main symbolic areas, which refer to the social representation of envy. The interpretative process of each repertoire (that is labelled by the researcher) is based on using models of affective symbolization (Carli, Paniccia, 2002) - such as, inclusion/exclusion, power/dependence, trust/mistrust - to give sense to the words co-occurring in each thematic domain<sup>1</sup>.

In this regard, three different areas of affective symbolizations can be proposed which refer to primitive emotions people use to transform reality into something familiar. They deal with symbolic dichotomies, which have a clear reference to the body: inside/outside, high/low, in front/behind. The first dichotomy refers to the dynamic of inclusion/exclusion because what is "inside" is represented as something good and friendly, while what is out "outside" is dangerous and rejected. We could continue

with the high/low dichotomy, which implies symbols of power or with the in front/behind dichotomy, which refers to emotional dynamics of true and false. This inferential process also relies on an in-depth qualitative analysis of the text segments derived from the newspaper headlines/subheadings (i.e., the elementary context units) grouped in each cluster.

Then, correspondence analysis enables the exploration of the relationship between clusters in n-dimensional spaces, so as to detect the latent factors, which organize the main semantic oppositions in the textual corpus. The association between clusters and factors is expressed by relative contributions (Squared Cosines), which consent to judge the quality of representation of each cluster on the latent dimensions detected. Only clusters offering the highest values, respectively on the positive and negative pole of each factor, are kept to explain the dimension (Lebart, Morineau, Piron, 1995; Greenacre, 2007). Indeed, the interpretative analysis of each factor (labeled by the researcher) is based on the meaningful themes (clusters) that deal with different and opposite symbolic contents pertaining to the same issue (latent dimension).

## RESULTS

The analysis detected five Cultural Repertoires (clusters) shaping the social representation of envy proposed in psychological literature. Table 1 shows both the percentage of the textual corpus of which each cluster is composed of, a list of the most characteristic lemmas (keywords) and some examples of headlines (elementary context units) derived from the newspaper articles analyzed.

<sup>1</sup> As an example of co-occurrence interpretation, think about two different clusters of words regarding the cultural models of immigration:

1) stranger - threat - terrorism

2) poverty - inclusion - solidarity

We can note that, in the first cluster, immigrant is emotionally regarded as "stranger" and thus as distant from one's own social system. The following words (threat, terrorism) suggest a feeling of danger and deep mistrust that is evoked by this distance: immigrant represents a powerful enemy from whom to defend oneself, within a conflicting relationship. On the other side, the second cluster relates immigration to "poverty", which deals with the lack of resources and social disadvantage. The following words (inclusion, solidarity) seem to better define the symbolization of immigrant as a weak and powerlessness person, who needs for help and social belonging, mainly within an affiliative dynamic.

Table 1. The most characteristic keywords and elementary context units in thematic domains

<b>Cluster 1 (20%): PRIMARY DESTRUCTIVENESS</b>
<b>Keywords</b>
<i>PATIENT</i> ( $\chi^2 = 88.70$ ); <i>ANALYST</i> ( $\chi^2 = 26.47$ ); <i>PRIMARY PROCESS</i> ( $\chi^2 = 22.38$ ); <i>CLINICAL</i> ( $\chi^2 = 18.91$ ); <i>PROJECTIVE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 18.56$ ); <i>THERAPY</i> ( $\chi^2 = 16.72$ ); <i>SUPEREGO</i> ( $\chi^2 = 14.59$ ); <i>FORCE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 14.59$ ); <i>INTERNAL</i> ( $\chi^2 = 11.71$ ); <i>TRANSFERENCE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 9.80$ ); <i>DESTRUCTIVE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 8.92$ ); <i>PSYCHE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 8.75$ )
<b>Elementary context units</b>
Envy appears in an analysis as a hostile, life-destroying force and is directed at the good qualities of the object, often manifesting in the patient's need to devalue analytic work that has been helpful. An intractable negative therapeutic reaction can thus become a persistent feature of an analysis. These examples capture the working through of intrapsychic and intersubjective envy as well as the struggle to detoxify envy and its derivatives. Self-envy interpretations may help the analyst deal with the transference pressure unconsciously exerted by these patients to establish a perverse collusion with the analyst.
<b>Cluster 2 (23%): SUBJECTIVE UNFAIRNESS</b>
<b>Keywords</b>
<i>GROUP</i> ( $\chi^2 = 40.39$ ); <i>STATUS</i> ( $\chi^2 = 25.05$ ); <i>SOCIAL</i> ( $\chi^2 = 16.04$ ); <i>DESERVINGNESS</i> ( $\chi^2 = 12.73$ ); <i>CLASS</i> ( $\chi^2 = 9.61$ ); <i>COMPARISON</i> ( $\chi^2 = 9.21$ ); <i>RATING</i> ( $\chi^2 = 8.01$ ); <i>SELF-EVALUATION</i> ( $\chi^2 = 6.31$ ); <i>RESOURCE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 6.09$ ); <i>DIFFERENCE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 5.57$ ); <i>JUSTICE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 4.02$ ); <i>INEQUALITY</i> ( $\chi^2 = 4.02$ )
<b>Elementary context units</b>
This study used deservingness theory (Feather, 1999) to investigate how perceptions by a low status observer that his or her low status is deserved or undeserved affects the observer's envy and resentment towards a deserving or undeserving high achiever. Merit envy is proposed to be a kind of shame based anger at those who seem to deserve their greater success. Results support the predictions that the content and intensity of satisfaction of the other, as well as background information about the heroes describing the "requirements of justice" for both of them, were systematically related to the intensity of envy reaction.
<b>Cluster 3 (16%): NARCISSISTIC DEFENSE</b>
<b>Keywords</b>
<i>MOTHER</i> ( $\chi^2 = 112.39$ ); <i>LOVE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 67.94$ ); <i>NARCISSISTIC</i> ( $\chi^2 = 66.68$ ); <i>WISH</i> ( $\chi^2 = 41.09$ ); <i>BABY</i> ( $\chi^2 = 26.41$ ); <i>FANTASY</i> ( $\chi^2 = 21.58$ ); <i>DEPRIVE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 20.90$ ); <i>FIXATION</i> ( $\chi^2 = 15.33$ ); <i>DEFENCE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 14.28$ ); <i>INJURY</i> ( $\chi^2 = 12.99$ ); <i>CASTRATION</i> ( $\chi^2 = 12.30$ ); <i>OMNIPOTENT</i> ( $\chi^2 = 10.42$ )
<b>Elementary context units</b>
For the infant, the mother's breast is the fountain of life, a restoring agent of the lost prenatal unity in fantasy. The frustrating, food-retaining breast is, on the other hand, the base of missing satisfaction. The frustrated infant envies everything that its mother possesses and it is deprived of. From this point of view, experiences of deprivation give rise to envy and greedy sadistic fantasies that are projected, resulting in persecutory anxiety that is defended against by splitting and fantasies of omnipotent power over others, seen as part objects to be exploited and controlled. The emergence of envy seems to coincide with the development of the theory of mind. During childhood to youth, envy characterized by a strong sense of something lacking within the self is felt, causing distress, and several coping strategies are used until adulthood.

Table continues

Table 1 (continued)

<b>Cluster 4 (34%): COMPETITIVE TENDENCY</b>
<b>Keywords</b>
<i>INFLUENCE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 19.29$ ); <i>COMPETITION</i> ( $\chi^2 = 8.90$ ); <i>ENRICH</i> ( $\chi^2 = 7.82$ ); <i>INTOLERANCE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 7.82$ ); <i>RIVALRY</i> ( $\chi^2 = 7.47$ ); <i>EVOLUTIONARY</i> ( $\chi^2 = 7.47$ ); <i>INTEREST</i> ( $\chi^2 = 7.27$ ); <i>USAGE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 6.57$ ); <i>ENGAGE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 5.86$ ); <i>LIE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 5.86$ ); <i>SIN</i> ( $\chi^2 = 5.83$ ); <i>CAPACITY</i> ( $\chi^2 = 4.48$ )
<b>Elementary context units</b>
The authors provide an overview of two of the most intriguing of the so-called "complex" emotions. Both jealousy and envy are concerned with possessing some valued thing. This can result in the subtle, indirect and often insidious expression of envy which undermines leadership and interferes with the effective running of the organization. Evolutionary psychology provides insights into the circumstances that are predicted to elicit envy and the types of behavioral strategies that are expected to be motivated by envy.
<b>Cluster 5 (7%): MALICIOUS JOY</b>
<b>Keywords</b>
<i>MISFORTUNE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 176.94$ ); <i>SCHADENFREUDE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 147.66$ ); <i>ANGER</i> ( $\chi^2 = 64.21$ ); <i>PLEASURE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 55.01$ ); <i>RESENTMENT</i> ( $\chi^2 = 25.59$ ); <i>ALLEVIATE</i> ( $\chi^2 = 11.22$ ); <i>OTHER-DIRECTED</i> ( $\chi^2 = 11.22$ ); <i>SPIRITUAL</i> ( $\chi^2 = 8.25$ ); <i>HOSTILITY</i> ( $\chi^2 = 8.03$ ); <i>GLOAT</i> ( $\chi^2 = 6.86$ ); <i>COVERT</i> ( $\chi^2 = 6.30$ ); <i>WELL-BEING</i> ( $\chi^2 = 4.93$ )
<b>Elementary context units</b>
We discuss recent research on schadenfreude (pleasure at the misfortune of others) that has been shown to be a frequent consequence of envy when an envied person suffers. Envy and schadenfreude (gloating over the other's misfortune) are social emotions widely agreed to be a symptom of the human social tendency to compare one's payoffs with those of others. These results suggest that envy predicts schadenfreude when people are confronted with the misfortune of a relevant social comparison other.

*Note:* The threshold value of Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) for each lemma is 3.84 (df = 1; p = 0.05). Textual data were translated into English only for the purposes of the paper.

### *Cultural Repertoires*

*Primary destructiveness (Cluster 1).* Envy is conceived as a constitutional aggression connected to the individual's emotional experience and thus as a natural part of being human, consistently with a psychoanalytic framework. It represents an early expression of the primitive death instinct, regarded as a self-destructing, innate and unconscious force, which can be projected out and attributed to others. In this sense, it relates to the impulse to spoil something desirable, per-

ceived as lacking, that another person possesses and enjoys.

*Subjective unfairness (Cluster 2).* Envy is mainly seen as a moral feeling related to social justice principles, in terms of equality of opportunity and access to resources. Indeed, envy arises from social comparisons with advantaged others in domains of personal relevance. People perceive themselves as having a low social status and consider others' superior position or reputation as unfair. Envy thus works as a means to re-establish a sense of social deservingness, in order to alleviate feeling of inferiority and



frustration they experience within power relationships.

*Narcissistic defense (Cluster 3).* Envy is conceived as a psychic defense arising from an experience of affective deprivation, unsatisfactory feeding and unfavorable circumstances which disturb full gratification. According to the object relations theory, by attacking the good object it is possible to ward off feelings of vulnerability, dependency and defectiveness that are evoked by recognizing the goodness in another person. In this sense, envy relies on the desire to destroy good things if the alternative is that others have them, thus avoiding painful injury to one's self esteem and maintaining a sense of narcissistic omnipotence.

*Competitive tendency (Cluster 4).* Envy refers to a deliberate will to gain power and influence over others within competitive dynamics. It deals with a desire for success, which aims at strengthening one's capacities, based on a self-actualizing force. Consistently with an evolutionary perspective, envy is the expression of an interpersonal rivalry, which stimulates individuals to narrow the gap be-

tween themselves and the superior other. However, despite its adaptive function, this emotional state seems to be associated with anomic and amoral values characterized by individualism and egoism.

*Malicious joy (Cluster 5).* Envy deals with a propensity to perceive the well-being of others with distress, even though it does not detract from one's own. It consists in malicious pleasure deriving from gloating over others' misfortune (*schadenfreude*), which renders the advantaged other less enviable and thus cuts away the very basis of envy in social comparison. Despite the fact that it reduces some negative emotions such as secret hostility, anger and resentment at someone else's higher achievement, it mainly refers to a satisfying emotion arising from failure of another disliked person in order to view oneself positively.

#### *Latent Dimensions*

Correspondence Analysis has detected four latent dimensions which organize the main semantic oppositions in the textual cor-

Table 2. Relative contributions of factors to each cluster

	Factor 1 <i>Source</i>	Factor 2 <i>Function</i>	Factor 3 <i>Self-awareness</i>	Factor 4 <i>Legitimacy</i>
Cluster 1 <i>Primary destructiveness</i>	0.41 (+)	0.01 (+)	0.58 (-)	0.00
Cluster 2 <i>Subjective unfairness</i>	0.42 (-)	0.26 (+)	0.00	0.32 (+)
Cluster 3 <i>Narcissistic defense</i>	0.41 (+)	0.46 (-)	0.09 (+)	0.04 (+)
Cluster 4 <i>Competitive tendency</i>	0.00	0.35 (+)	0.24 (+)	0.41 (-)
Cluster 5 <i>Malicious joy</i>	0.65 (-)	0.32 (-)	0.02 (-)	0.01 (-)

Note: The sign reported in brackets (-/+) indicates the specific factorial pole (negative/positive) associated with each cluster

pus, from the different position of clusters in the factorial space, as indicated by relative contributions (Table 2). These four latent factors explain all of the data variance ( $R^2 = 100\%$ ).

*Source of envy: internal or external agency (Factor 1).* The first factor (45.3% of the total variance) differentiates clusters 1 and 3 from clusters 2 and 5 and refers to a different symbolization of envy, based on its double source. On the one hand, envy refers to an internal agency (the Self) and is mainly seen as an intrapsychic emotional process connected to a primary aggressive impulse (cluster 1) or to a defense mechanism ensuring narcissistic omnipotence (cluster 3). On the other hand, envy depends on an external source (the Others) because it arises from social comparison and power interpersonal relationships, respectively based on perceiving someone else's undeserved success (cluster 2) or on taking pleasure in another's misfortune (cluster 5).

*Function of envy: self-development or other-derogation (Factor 2).* The second factor (29.9% of the total variance) differentiates clusters 2 and 4 from clusters 3 and 5 and refers to an opposite function of envy, in terms of motivational dynamics. On the one hand, envy seems to rely on a self-actualizing goal, which aims at reducing power gap in social comparison (cluster 2) or at improving one's own capacities within competitive relationships (cluster 4). On the other hand, envy arises from a hostile force oriented to other-derogation, by attacking and destroying another's goodness (cluster 3) or gaining pleasure from others' suffering (cluster 5).

*Self-awareness in envy: low or high control (Factor 3).* The third factor (14.7% of the total variance) opposes clusters 1 and 4

and deals with a different level of self-awareness in the feeling and expression of envy. On the one hand, envy is depicted as an unconscious force, mostly linked to an innate and uncontrollable destructive impulse (cluster 1); on the other hand, it is conceived as a voluntary expression of competitive tendency based on the need for power and success (cluster 4).

*Legitimacy of envy: moral or amoral values (Factor 4).* The fourth factor (10.1% of the total variance) differentiates clusters 2 and 4 and refers to an opposite moral legitimacy of envy. On the one hand, envy seems to be socially accepted as it refers to moral values of social deservingness, equality and justice (cluster 1); on the other hand, envy is depicted as amoral and anomic emotion based on a competitive and individualistic tendency, disrupting social relationships (cluster 4).

## DISCUSSION

The study findings suggest that the most relevant conceptualization of envy (34% of the total textual corpus) is associated with the theme of competitive tendency. Indeed, as confirmed by literature, envy is hypothesized to have been shaped by selection to facilitate successful social competition for access to resources that affect fitness. A central component of successful resource competition is rendering oneself more deserving of the resources one is competing for relative to others who are striving to achieve the same goal (Buss, 1988). Fiske et al. (2002) confirmed that when outgroups possess stereotypical high status or competence but are not perceived to be in competition with one's own ingroup, then members of such outgroups produce emotions such as respect

and admiration. By contrast, when high status outgroups are perceived to be in competition with one's own group, then envy is a common result. The implications of these distinct emotions are profound. Whereas respect and admiration should produce benevolent reactions, envy should produce antagonism and begrudging attitudes toward the outgroup's high status. In this regard, envious hostility may often play an important role (Vecchio, 2000, 2005) in work organizations because workplace often is a competitive and hierarchical domain. A clear empirical example of this is the study by Schaubroeck and Lam (2004), revealing that envy can mediate the dislike of fellow employees who had the advantage of being promoted.

On the contrary, the less salient theme dealt with by scholarly psychological publications refers to malicious joy or *schadenfreude* (only 7% of the total corpus), despite the fact that commonsense widely recognizes it as the main form of envy. In more detail, a number of studies suggested the hostile nature of envy by showing that envy predisposes a person to feel pleasure when a misfortune befalls the envied person (Brigham et al., 1997; Smith et al., 1996). *Schadenfreude*, especially in response to an undeserved misfortune, clearly suggests an underlying hostility on the part of the person feeling envy. Although there may be circumstances in which people express it openly, *schadenfreude* is a socially undesirable emotion. Social norms and the average person's internalized values would seem to work against both the private feeling of *schadenfreude* and certainly its public expression, at least when the feeling is inspired simply by another person's advantage and particularly when the misfortune is undeserved. In this regard,

envious hostility appears to resist being subdued despite its abhorrent nature, suggesting its intractable influence and power (Smith, Kim, 2007).

Further conceptualizations of envy emerging from our study results respectively refer to: subjective unfairness (23%), primary destructiveness (20%) and narcissistic defense (16%).

With regard to subjective unfairness, research suggests that invidious comparison often creates a subjective sense that the envied person's advantage is unfair, which, in turn, triggers the feelings of ill will (Smith et al., 1994). Although motivational variables and various self-serving construals of social comparison information may blunt the perceived effects of social comparisons (Wood, Wilson, 2003), many experiments empirically demonstrated that the perception of unjust treatment leads to negative emotions (Suls, Wheeler, 2000), such as anger (Brown, 1985) and revenge (Kim, Smith, 1993; Kim, Smith, Brigham, 1998). Such subjective sense of injustice predicts not only depressive reactions but also hostility. Thus, it appears that the sense of injustice that we argue is part of envy may provide another factor that may help explain its hostile nature (Smith, 2000).

In addition, scholars often claim that envy can be also seen as a primary destructiveness because people feeling envy would just as soon have the desired advantage destroyed (or the person or persons enjoying the advantage) if they themselves are denied it (Smith, Kim, 2007). The literature on this approach is vast and still evolving (Etchegoyen, Nemas, 2003), and, given its emphasis on unconscious processes, a psychoanalytic perspective may be worth considering. In more detail, envy is claimed to

have an enveloping, corrosive character that sours one's view of life, a kind of "poison spreading throughout the body" (Schimmel, 1993, p. 60). Indeed, envy can involve an unconscious projective identification with the envied person (Etchegoyen, Nemas, 2003), who represents the image of whom the envying person would want to be in the ideal sense. But, because feelings of inferiority partly motivate such identification, this idealization is blended with resentment and derogation. Identification works because people feeling envy can praise the idealized envied object (deflecting the attribution of envy) and yet find room to be critical as well (thus appeasing their envy).

Then, it is demonstrated that envious hostility arises as a defense against the withering implications of blameworthy inferiority (Smith, Kim, 2007). Derogating a rival (usually on moral dimensions that lend themselves to biased perception) serves as a narcissistic defense against the threat to the self as negative feelings about the self become projected onto the advantaged person. This possibility is consistent with research in other domains showing that the self-image threats lead people to denigrate others as a means to restore a favorable self-image (Fein, Spencer, 1997), as confirmed by studies on workplace settings (Vecchio, 2005).

Based on the latent dimensions highlighted by our study results, some considerations can be made in accordance with existing research findings.

The first factor concerns two different conceptualizations of envy as emotion respectively depending on inner or external sources. According to Klein's concept of "constitutional envy" (Klein, 1957), envy can be regarded as "a quasi-nuclear concept, a cornerstone in the psychoanalytic process"

(Feldman, De Paola, 1994, p. 217) because it is the expression of destructive impulses, operative from the beginning of life, connected to death instinct as well as to defense mechanisms. On the contrary, according to the classic theory of social comparison developed by Festinger (1954), envy is not innate but consists in emotional response to the outcome of others (Polledri, 2012). In detail, upward comparisons may cause the individual to become painfully aware of the fact that he or she lacks another's superior quality (Smith et al., 1996), especially when the domain being compared is of particular importance to the individual's self-concept (Salovey, Rodin, 1991). Envy thus begins with an unflattering social comparison resulting in a quick, painful perception of inferiority (Foster, 1972; Salovey, Rodin, 1984; Silver, Sabini, 1978; Smith, 1991).

With regard to the functions of envy (self-development or other-derogation), the current literature confirms the double faceted conceptualization of envy respectively regarded as benign or malignant force (Van de Ven, Zeelberg, Pieters, 2009). Benign envy denotes the type of envy that motivates envious people to remove differences with the envied through self-improvement and hard work (Van de Ven, 2009). It is qualitatively different from "malicious" envy which deals with inappropriate derogation of the envied person's achievements, as Silver and Sabini's (1978) study on perceptions of envy shows, and unappealing backbiting, as Wert and Salovey's (2004) analysis of gossip suggests. As just noted, envious people are probably less likely to appreciate qualities in others that might cause delight in the nonenvious; rather, contempt and ill will may be the typical and repellent reaction to these qualities. If the envious feel delight, it

may more typically come in the form of *schadenfreude* when advantaged people suffer.

Another important factor emerging from our analysis refers to self-awareness in envy, respectively depicted as unconscious force or as voluntary competitive tendency. In this regard, given the nature of envy and the problems of awareness and social desirability, many scholars claim that people not only avoid admitting envy to others but that they also loathe to acknowledge this feeling in private as well (Foster, 1972; Schoeck, 1969; Silver, Sabini, 1978). These presumed tendencies may largely be because envy is so painful and self-threatening (Foster, 1972) and because societal norms reinforce its repugnant nature (Silver, Sabini, 1978). In this sense, the combining of traditional self and peer reports of envy and envy-coping strategies, together with less direct approaches as suggested by Montaldi (1999), may be a useful research strategy to further disentangle the degree of awareness and control on envy in different contexts.

Then, about the opposite moral legitimacy of envy we found in our study, research shows that people feeling envy tend to find ways to justify their hostility, such as by making downward comparisons (Gibbons, Gerrard, 1991; Wills, 1981), especially on moral domains (Montaldi, 1999), thus rendering the advantaged person or persons undeserving of their advantage by virtue of their perceived moral failings. This downward comparison process may also be an alternative path from shame in some cases and may contribute to a shame-rage spiral. Envy increases moral disengagement and allows envious people to overcome the cognitive barriers, or self-sanctions, that most people abide by, breaking them “free of a prevailing

submissive frame of mind” (Smith, Kim, 2007, p. 53). People feeling envy are likely to nurture and feed the initial subjective sense of injustice and find ways to perceive the envied as undeserving of their advantages because of their moral failings. The label of envy for their feelings might be avoided because this undermines the legitimacy of their envy-based hostility. Over time, if a focus on the undeserved advantage of the envied dominates their thinking rather than their own contribution to the situation, people feeling envy might be able to convince themselves that they have an increasingly legitimate cause for feeling hostile, although they may still be wary of publicizing their feelings. This seemingly legitimate but largely private grievance should tend to give free license for envious people to engage in a variety of indirectly hostile behaviors (Smith, Kim, 2007).

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore some conceptualizations of envy portrayed in scholarly psychological publications. Five main cultural models of scientific knowledge are detected, which shape the social construction of envy, dealing with primary destructiveness (1), subjective unfairness (2), narcissistic defense (3), competitive tendency (4) and malicious joy (5). These different representations are conceived along four latent dimensions respectively regarding source (internal/external agency), function (self-development/other-derogation), self-awareness (low/high control) and legitimacy (moral/amoral values) of envy.

Overall, two main psychological views about envy emerge. The first one refers to psychoanalytic tradition, according to which envy is a central facet of human experience

(Klein, 1957; Segal, 1964) and an unconscious phenomenon, mostly involuntary and uncontrollable, taking place in the minds of individuals (Stein, 2000). The second one proposes a psychosocial perspective, which relates envy to the feeling of inferiority arising from social comparisons with advantaged others (Alicke, Zell, 2008; Feather, Sherman, 2002; Smith, Kim, 2007), connected to a culturally prescribed hierarchy of what is desirable and worthy (Sabini, Silver, 1982). In this sense, envy may be depicted as leading to an amoral and competitive individualism, as well as to a legitimated hostility against social undeservingness (Salovey, 1991). These two main research traditions are also confirmed by the recent review on envy carried out by Smith and Kim (2007). The authors highlighted two domains in which envy is beginning to play a role in theoretical and empirical advances: mental and physical health and prejudice and inter-group relations. Indeed, on the one hand, envy seems to be related to research fields such as psychoanalysis, clinical psychology, health and well-being psychology which propose an individualistic perspective on envy emotion; on the other hand, envy is dealt with by social psychology, work and organizational psychology and evolutionary perspective, which highlight the role of envy in the individual-context relationship.

In addition, results show that envy can be regarded as a two-sided coin (Schoeck, 1969). Envy may be a destructive force, which can compel the envious to actively undermine and hinder the advancement of others and thus can create a hostile work and living environment (Smith, Kim, 2007; Van de Ven et al., 2009). However, envy may also be a constructive force (Grolleau, Mzoughi, Sutan, 2009), which can compel the envious to strive

harder in hopes of attaining the status of those who are advantaged.

In conclusion, envy shows a catalytic and conservative nature, respectively in terms of potential change agent and cultural affirmation of rights and obligations (Patient, Lawrence, Maitlis, 2003). Indeed, envy, paradoxically, seems both to threaten and help to preserve social order (Schoeck, 1969), by stimulating competitive hostility and interpersonal conflict or, on the contrary, by guaranteeing control and conformity to necessary norms of social justice and equality. Regardless of its destructive or constructive nature, envy is thus persistent and universal and plays a deep social role. It may help explain why humans are comparatively less hierarchical than other primate species and more prone to egalitarianism, as well as human conflicts and acts of terrorism, formation of political and social structures in different societies.

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## SOCIÁLNE KONŠTRUOVANIE ZÁVISTI VO VEDECKEJ KOMUNITE: ANALÝZA VEDECKÝCH PSYCHOLOGICKÝCH PUBLIKÁCIÍ

### A. C a p u t o

*Súhrn:* Štúdia skúma rozdielane konceptualizácie závislosti vo vedeckých psychologických publikáciách, a to v zmysle kultúrnych modelov zdieľaných vo vedeckej komunite, ktoré prispievajú k sociálnemu konštruovaniu tohto emočného zážitku. Analyzovali sa abstrakty 450 textov z databázy PsycINFO na základe teórie sociálnej reprezentácie kde sme odhalili päť hlavných reprezentácií závislosti, ako sú primárna deštruktivita, subjektívna neférovosť, narcistická obrana, súťaživosť a škodoradosť. Tieto sú zvažované vzhľadom na štyri latentné dimenzie, a to zdroj (interný/externý agent), funkcia (sebarozvíjanie/znevažovanie ostatných), sebauvedomovanie (nízka/vysoká kontrola) a legitimita (morálne/amorálne hodnoty) závislosti. Výsledky ukazujú psychoanalytickú a psychosociálnu perspektívu závislosti a jej paradoxnú funkciu v sociálnom poriadku.