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# ENVY AS PAIN: RETHINKING THE NATURE OF ENVY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYEES AND ORGANIZATIONS

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**Although envy has been characterized by resentment, hostility, and ill will, researchers have begun to investigate envy's benign manifestations. We contend that the substance of envy has been confounded with its consequences. We conceptualize envy as pain at another's good fortune. This reconceptualization allows envy to result in both positive and negative consequences. We then examine how envy affects interpersonal behaviors and job performance, contingent on core self-evaluation, referent cognitions, and perceived organizational support.**

Envy is rampant in the workplace. People compete for scarce resources, for the time and attention of organizational authorities, and for preferred job assignments and promotions, and there are always winners and losers in such competitions. These situations invariably trigger envy in those who are losers. Coveting the attributes of a colleague or newcomer, attributes that one might lack, is another trigger for envy. Feelings of envy can certainly be focused on perceived imbalances in financial outcomes, and they can also be about things of symbolic value. For instance, a survey by Staples, Inc. on Twitter found that three out of four respondents admitted to "office-chair envy"—that is, coveting a coworker's office chair (*Boston Globe*, 2010). This is because people believe that a better office chair is symbolic of higher status.

The dominant view of organizational and social scientists has been that envy, although endemic to the human condition, is a psychological state with negative individual, interpersonal, and collective consequences (Smith & Kim, 2007). "Envy" is derived from the Latin term *invidere*, which means to "look at another with malice" (*Webster's Online Dictionary*). From this perspective, bearing ill will and hostility toward those who "cause" envy is central to what being envious is about (e.g., Parrott, 1991; Parrott & Smith, 1993; Smith, 2004), and this closely aligns envy with negative attitudes and behaviors (Smith & Kim, 2007).

Some scholars have articulated more positive views on envy, describing it as benign, admiring, and emulative (Neu, 1980; Rawls, 1971; van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2009). In contrast to the dominant approach, these scholars have affirmed the adaptive potential of envy, emphasizing that envy can motivate people to excel, thus reducing the gap that exists between them and envied targets by raising themselves rather than by bringing others down.

However, in both traditional scholarship on "malicious envy" and more recent work on "benign envy," the substance of envy and its meaning are derived from envy's consequences. That is, malicious envy is aligned with negative outcomes alone and benign envy with positive outcomes (van de Ven et al., 2009). Unfortunately, confounding what envy "is" with what envy "does" verges on the tautological, and it obscures from view the mechanisms through which envy affects behavior. The premise of our research is that the substance of envy can and should be decoupled from its consequences. Based on this understanding, we outline a more focused definition of envy as *pain at another person's good fortune*, and we explain associations between this singular envy construct and both positive and negative outcomes for individuals and organizations.

Early Greek philosophers thought of envy as pain experienced on account of another's good

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fortune (cf. Plato, 2007/360 BCE). In keeping with this view, we define envy as pain from unfavorable or upward social comparisons. Recent evidence from neuroscience validates this view by showing that the brain regions associated with pain (i.e., the anterior cingulate cortex) are activated by the experience of envy (Takahashi et al., 2009). As with pain in general, envy can be further understood as a homeostatic emotion reflecting an adverse condition in the body that impels a behavioral response (Craig, 2003). Homeostasis is the ongoing process that helps the body maintain optimal balance in its physiological condition for the purpose of survival. For example, when encountering extreme external temperatures, the body regulates itself so that the internal temperature remains at 98.6 degrees Farenheit. The experience of envy—a form of social pain—upsets the psychological balance and, much like a homeostatic response to regulate body temperature, triggers behavior to restore it. Drawing from conceptual and empirical work on action tendencies of emotions (Bagozzi, Verbeke, & Gavino, 2003; Frijda, 1986; Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989), we associate envy with threat- and challenge-oriented action tendencies focused on restoring balance through some combination of undermining the envied target and/or raising the self (van de Ven et al., 2009). Furthermore, we examine key individual and situational factors that moderate envy's effects and, thus, the positive and negative effects of envy on individuals and organizations.

We make three important contributions to the emerging literature on envy in social and organizational settings. First, our reconceptualization of envy with attendant action tendencies helps clarify envy's substance and distinguishes it from potential behavioral consequences. Second, in identifying potential positive and negative behavioral consequences of envy, we provide a more holistic and balanced treatment of envy in the workplace. Third, we open up new avenues for inquiry by explaining the psychological mechanisms by which envy affects behavior and how relevant psychological factors—core self-evaluations (self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, and neuroticism), referent cognitions (warmth and competence), and perceived organizational support—moderate envy's behavioral effects.

## ENVY: AN OVERVIEW

### Traditional View

Social comparisons, especially the unfavorable comparisons that provide a diagnostic perspective on the self, are the building blocks of envy (Gilbert, Giesler, & Morris, 1995). In their review of psychological research on envy, Smith and Kim defined envy as "an unpleasant and often painful blend of feelings characterized by inferiority, hostility, and resentment caused by a comparison with a person or group of persons who possess something we desire" (2007: 49). Consistent with this understanding, Parrot and Smith affirmed that "envy arises when a person lacks another's superior quality, achievements, or possession and either desires it or wishes that the other lacked it" (1993: 908).

This view associates envy with negativity and hostility toward others and negative outcomes for the self. As an episodic emotion, envy predicts greater hostility toward and reduced desire for friendship with envied parties (Salovey & Rodin, 1984), reduced openness to sharing information with them (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2004), and a stronger desire to harm them (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007). Episodic envy also predicts unethical behaviors, such as acting dishonestly to hurt envied parties (Gino & Pierce, 2009a), not helping them (Gino & Pierce, 2010), and overstating personal accomplishments (Gino & Pierce, 2009b). As a stable individual difference, envy predicts depressive tendencies and poor mental health (Smith, Parrott, Diener, Hoyle, & Kim, 1999), lower job and group satisfaction, lower organization-based self-esteem, feelings of group potency, and greater withdrawal—absenteeism, turnover intentions, and reduced commitment (Duffy & Shaw, 2000; Vecchio, 2000, 2005).

Notwithstanding the consistency of these findings, close coupling of envy's substance with negative consequences may be distorting how envy is operationalized and studied. For instance, the widely used Dispositional Envy Scale (DES) captures envy as something that plagues and torments people (e.g., "No matter what I do, envy always plagues me" and "Feelings of envy constantly torment me"; Smith et al., 1999). With an operational measure fixed on envy's negative aspects, it is not surprising to find exclusively negative outcomes associated with envy. Furthermore, the close coupling of

envy with hostile action tendencies and consequences may be obscuring from view the underlying psychological processes through which envy influences behavior, as well as the individual and situational factors that moderate envy's effects on behavior.

Overall, from this perspective, envy is associated with strong negative action tendencies. Indeed, as Elster affirms, "The action tendency of envy is to destroy the envied object or its possessor" (1999: 39). One might thus conclude that the action tendencies of envy are exclusively negative and inevitably lead to negative outcomes. We contend that envious parties genuinely desire the accomplishments of envied targets and that action tendencies oriented toward achievement may also be activated by envy. From this perspective, challenge-oriented action tendencies may either supplant or coexist with those that are more hostile in nature.

### Alternative View

Although the body of empirical evidence linking envy with negative outcomes continues to grow, recent work suggests that envy can also lead to positive outcomes. For instance, envy has been found to predict an increased admiration for and a willingness to learn from envied targets (Cohen-Charash, 2009; van de Ven et al., 2009), enhanced work motivation (Cohen-Charash, 2009), and increased job performance (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004). These findings support the view of scholars positing the existence of another form of envy that is benign, emulative, and admiring in nature (Neu, 1980; Parrott, 1991; Rawls, 1971). Indeed, the fact that these empirical findings cannot be explained through mainstream envy scholarship suggests the need for further theoretical development.

Although research on benign envy is at a nascent stage, empirical findings reported by van de Ven and colleagues (2009) show that such envy can be systematically studied. These authors distinguish benign envy from malicious envy. Their studies, conducted with diverse methodologies across cultures, show that benign envy is characterized by feelings of liking and admiration for the envied target and motivation to achieve, and it is empirically distinct from malicious envy. Importantly, their findings align benign envy with action tendencies focused on raising the self to the level of the envied target rather than bringing the target down.

Although research on benign envy has broadened the scope of envy scholarship, it shares one important limitation with traditional envy research: the coupling of envy's substance with its consequences. That is, malicious envy is linked primarily to negative outcomes, and benign envy is associated exclusively with positive outcomes. Furthermore, this approach fails to explain, for any given situation, why one form of envy and its set of action tendencies is more likely to determine behavior than another. Finally, it says little about either the psychological processes linking envy with behavioral outcomes or the factors moderating these relationships.

### Our View: Envy As Pain

The element that is common to both malicious envy and benign envy is the sensation of pain. On the one hand, Smith and Kim (2007: 47) define envy as "an unpleasant and often painful blend of feelings" associated with unfavorable social comparisons. On the other hand, van de Ven and colleagues (2009) affirm that benign envy entails pain and frustration with another's superiority. Clearly, this aspect of experienced pain at another's good fortune is the defining quality of envy. It has been central to conceptions of envy since antiquity (e.g., Plato), and it has been validated by evidence from neuroscience (Takahashi et al., 2009).

The fundamental human drives to avoid pain and seek pleasure are well established in the behavioral sciences (Gray, 1987; Higgins, 1997). Experienced pain may have both physical and social bases (Frijda, 2007; MacDonald, 2009). As with pain and other homeostatic emotions, envy is an aversive emotion and a source of cognitive tension that provides impetus for action (Festinger, 1954; Vecchio, 1995). Thus, people are motivated to avoid painful emotions like envy by using strategies at their disposal to reduce its unpleasantness (Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994; MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Perceiving situations of envy in terms of "threat," they can become hostile toward the envied party—at the extreme even sabotaging the party (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007; Vecchio, 1997, 2007). Although this has been the principal focus of attention for envy researchers, it has not been established whether this is the only or the most

adaptive response. Envious parties can also see the "challenge" in the situation and respond by raising themselves to match the level of the envied target (van de Ven et al., 2009).[1]

Thus, the behavioral consequences of envy appear to proceed from two action tendencies—threat and challenge—that can jointly function to alleviate the pain of envy. One can try to undermine the position of the envied target and/or try to raise one's position to the level of the envied target (van de Ven et al., 2009). This understanding of the action tendencies of envy conforms to the foundational thinking of Frijda and colleagues (1989), who affirmed that complex social emotions like envy, jealousy, and shame are not easily aligned with any singular mode of action readiness. This means that engagement of one action tendency does not preclude engagement of the other, and envy may activate both action tendencies. However, we argue that the strength of the effect of each action tendency on behavior depends on individual and situational factors. Thus, our model allows for both action tendencies to operate in tandem and for the possibility that envy's consequences may entail behavior traditionally viewed as malicious, behavior traditionally viewed as benign, and in many instances some combination of the two (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002; Hobman, Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2009).

In summary, our view of envy is aligned with established traditions of envy scholarship in that we acknowledge the element of pain as central to envy. However, we are careful not to limit the set of action tendencies that envy can activate. When people experience envy, threat-oriented action tendencies focused on undermining others and challenge-oriented action tendencies providing impetus for self-improvement are both activated. Thus, we depart from the major traditions of envy scholarship by separating envy from its consequences and modeling the effects of a singular envy construct on a range of behavioral outcomes and on job performance.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF ENVY: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Building on our understanding of envy as a homeostatic emotion characterized by pain at another's good fortune that activates threat- and challenge-oriented action tendencies, we address the implications of envy for behavior. Given our focus on relationships of envy in work organizations, we discuss envy's implications for interpersonal relations (e.g., the extent to which envious parties help and/or undermine those they envy) and for the organizations in which these relationships are embedded (e.g., job performance). Additionally, we identify key psychological variables that moderate envy's relationships with interpersonal behavior and job performance and explain these effects. We summarize our theoretical model in Figure 1.

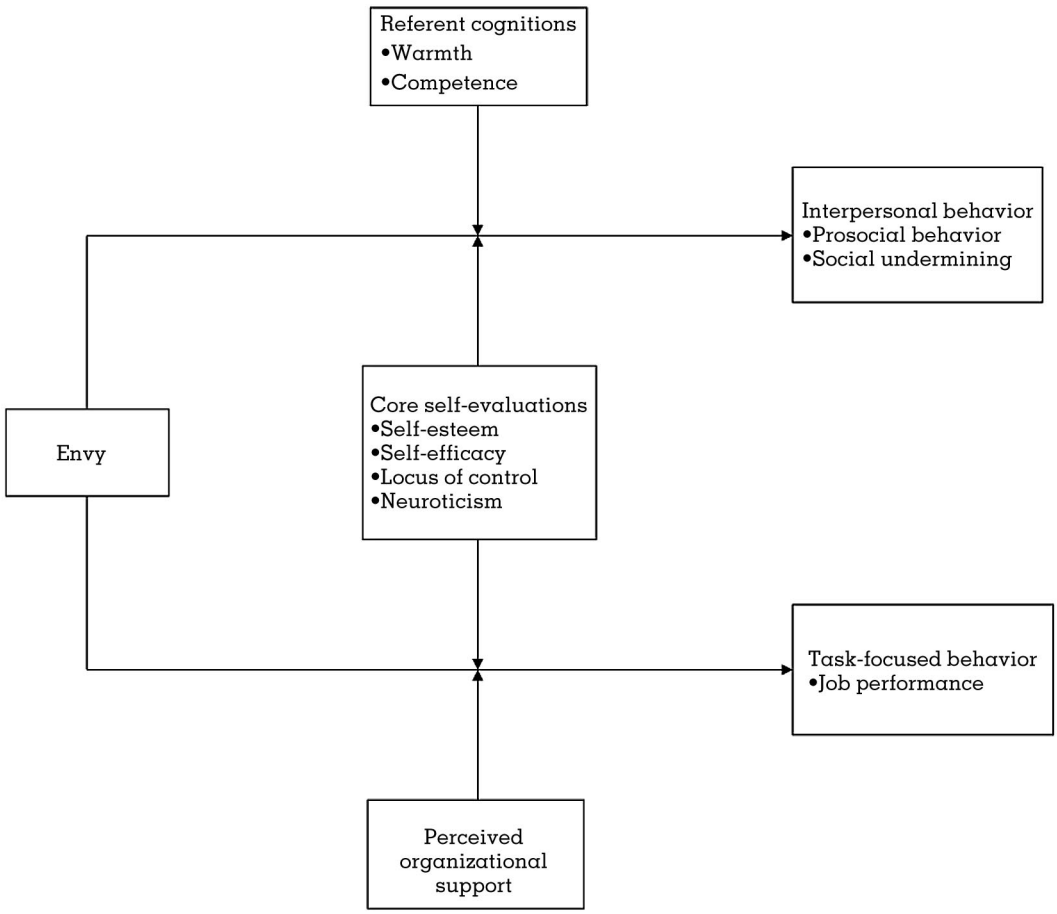
### Behavioral Outcomes of Envy

Equity theory provides a useful lens for understanding envy's behavioral consequences. It proposes that people make equity assessments by comparing the ratio of what they receive (outcomes) to what they contribute (inputs) with the corresponding ratios of referent others (Adams, 1965). Inequity from unfavorable social comparison is aversive and painful (Festinger, 1954; Heider, 1958), and it can lead to envy within the relationship. People can take steps to reduce this social pain by restoring equity through a variety of means (Pinder, 2008). We focus on social undermining, prosocial behavior, and job performance—three behavioral responses that might proceed from envy's threat- and challenge-oriented action tendencies.

**Social undermining.** Because sanctions against open expressions of envy are often present in organizations (Parrott & Smith, 1993), people frequently use covert means to restore balance with envied targets. Social undermining is one behavioral response to envy—focused on bringing down the other—that reflects envy's threat-oriented action tendency (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2006). Social undermining is characterized by "intentional actions that diminish a target's ability to establish and maintain posi-

[1] Our treatment of envy as social pain and a homeostatic emotion parallels Frijda's (2007) examination of vengeful acts as emotional responses rooted in a desire to address the social pain of insult, harm, shame, and humiliation at the hands of others. For Frijda, this quality of vengeance as a homeostatic emotion explains why it drives extreme behavior: "Its most proximal focus is to get rid of pain, and not to get even. The efforts are often in vain. Whatever the gains of revenge, they cannot undo the harm or truly wipe out the insult, the irreversible loss, or one's crushed sense of worth" (2007: 274).

**FIGURE 1**
**Theoretical Model of Envy and Outcomes**




tive relationships, work-related success, and favorable reputation in the workplace" (Duffy et al., 2002: 333). Indeed, recent research has shown that envy leads to social undermining for employees who do not identify with their coworkers or teams (Duffy, Scott, Shaw, Tepper, & Aquino, in press). In light of the negative affect associated with threat-oriented responses, these behaviors may serve as a means not only to restore balance in the equity equation but also to "let off steam" (Bies, Tripp, & Kramer, 1997).

Although there is some empirical evidence to suggest that unfavorable social comparisons are associated with increased negative affect, upward social comparisons can also be associated with increased positive affect (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, Van Yperen, & Dakof, 1990; Buunk, Ybema, Van der Zee, Schaufeli, & Gibbons, 2001). Indeed, empirical findings show that people making more upward social comparisons experience more positive affect compared to negative affect (Buunk, Van der Zee, & Van Yperen, 2001; Pelham & Wachsmuth, 1995).

Based on these findings, given the low positivity associated with social undermining, one would expect undermining to be reduced as positive affect increases. Furthermore, the linkage of upward social comparisons with negative affect is likely to be contingent on people's self-views (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999; see Buunk & Gibbons, 2007, for a review). Individuals with high self-esteem and positive self-views are less likely to experience negative affect as a result of upward social comparisons, and they are more likely to experience positive affect (Buunk et al., 1990). Thus, although people can respond to envy negatively by focusing on restoring balance and "getting even," which may entail social undermining, they can also respond positively by focusing on "getting ahead."

Consistent with envy's threat-oriented action tendency, traditional envy scholarship suggests social undermining as a likely behavioral consequence of envy. However, the broader literature on upward social comparisons suggests that the envy to social undermining relationship may not be so direct and that this linkage is moderated by individual differences.

**Prosocial behavior.** Prosocial behavior entails intentional prosocial acts performed to benefit specific others (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986; McNeely & Meglino, 1994). Research has shown that employees withhold organizational citizenship behaviors in response to perceived unfair treatment as a means to restore equity (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002; Organ, 1990; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). We view reduced prosocial behaviors as a consequence that likely follows from envy's threat-oriented action tendency.

In contrast to the threat-oriented action tendency of envy that drives reduced prosocial behaviors, the challenge-oriented action tendency might predict the opposite. Discretionary efforts to assist others, even those people envy, can make people look good, enhance their performance evaluations, and improve their chances for career advancement (Flynn, 2003, 2006; Grant & Mayer, 2009; Hui, Lam, & Law, 2000). Past research has demonstrated the potential for instrumental motives and concern for self-interest to motivate prosocial behavior (De Dreu, 2006; Grant & Mayer, 2009). Thus, although "simple" self-interested reasoning might predict reduced prosocial behaviors as a knee-jerk reaction to envy, increased prosocial behaviors might also occur as a more "strategic" self-interested response.

Beyond the logic of self-interest, we also recognize that employees concerned with the needs, interests, and desires of others may give considerable weight to social context factors, such as the extent to which an envied coworker is liked and trusted (De Dreu, 2006; De Dreu & Nauta, 2009). For these individuals, feelings of envy may signal to them that others have excluded them, and this felt exclusion, in turn, may engender prosocial behavior (Richman & Leary, 2009). Recent research has shown that when people sense the potential for exclusion from a social group to which they believe reconnection is possible, their willingness to trust and cooperate with group members increases (Derfler-Rozin, Pillutla, & Thau, 2010). Since envied coworkers are often successful, envious parties might be motivated to reconnect with them, and treating them in a prosocial manner might prove beneficial.

Thus, in contrast to the view that envy leads to reduced prosocial behavior, we acknowledge that envy can also drive increased prosocial behavior. Whereas the traditional view of envy highlights its threat-oriented action tendency attuned to bringing down the envied target, the alternative view captures envy's challenge-oriented action tendency attuned to raising the self.

**Job performance.** Beyond its implications for interpersonal treatment, envy may also affect job performance. Clearly, one approach to restoring equity is to reduce job performance. By producing less or contributing less on the job, the ratio of one's outcomes to inputs can be improved relative to the corresponding ratios of others (Pinder, 2008). Furthermore, beyond the immediate bounds of the social comparison relationship, envious parties may attribute some degree of responsibility for situations of inequity to the organization. To the extent that this is the case, employees should respond to the perceived injustice by decreasing their job performance. The line of reasoning we put forward here is consistent with past research linking perceived injustice with reduced job performance (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991). The sense of injustice felt by envious parties is often very palpable (Smith, Parrott, Ozer, & Moniz, 1994), and reduced performance represents one valid means of redress.

Another approach to restoring equity might entail doing the opposite—demonstrating initiative and increasing job performance. That is, from the standpoint of a challenge-oriented response to envy, increased job performance provides an alternative way to improve personal outcomes and, thus, to restore equity. Indeed, in a study of bank employees, Schaubroeck and Lam (2004) found that envy was strongly and positively associated with enhanced job performance among employees recently bypassed for job promotions. More generally, recent studies have shown that upward comparisons with superior coworkers can indeed be motivating (Brown, Ferris, Heller, & Keeping, 2007; Duffy, Shaw, & Schaubroeck, 2008). Furthermore, in-

creased rather than decreased effort on the job has been found to be more effective in addressing perceived inequity and obtaining outcomes on par with envied coworkers (Duffy et al., 2008). Hence, the challenge-oriented action tendency of envy may provide the impetus for people to restore equity through increased rather than decreased job performance.

In summary, we identify social undermining, prosocial behavior, and job performance as key behavioral outcomes of envy at work. In light of the dual action tendencies of envy—challenge oriented as well as threat oriented—we see potential for both positive and negative patterns of association between envy and its consequences. We argue, however, that the extent to which these patterns of association are observed depends on how envious parties view themselves (core self-evaluation), those they envy (referent cognitions), and the organization in which they work (perceived organizational support).

### Moderators of Envy's Effects

The dynamics that give rise to envy involve upward social comparisons, and they take place within an organizational context. In recognition of this embeddedness, we acknowledge that envy has implications not only for interpersonal treatment but also for job performance. The direction and magnitude of envy's effects on these outcomes are contingent on the extent to which envy activates threat- and challenge-oriented action tendencies. Given the centrality of the self in social comparison processes, we propose that individual differences in core self-evaluation moderate the relationship between envy and both interpersonal and task-focused behavior. Furthermore, we propose that referent cognitions—perceptions of the warmth and competence of the envied party—moderate the effects of envy on the treatment of that individual and that perceived organizational support—an assessment of the organization's care for employees—moderates the effects of envy on job performance.

Our approach to modeling these moderating effects is aligned with a multifocal target-matching perspective on social exchange relations (Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007; Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002; Stinglhamber, De Cremer, & Mercken, 2006). On the one hand, referent cognitions concerning an envied party have strong implications for social exchange with that individual and, thus, for the effects of envy on how he or she is treated, but they have less relevance for social exchange with the organization. This is because referent cognitions are interpersonal in nature and not task related. On the other hand, perceptions of organizational support and the quality of the individual-organization relationship have stronger implications for social exchange with the organization and the likely effects of envy on job performance, but they have less relevance for social exchange with the envied colleague.

**Core self-evaluations.** People's core self-evaluations—their bottom-line appraisals of themselves as competent, worthy, and in control of their lives (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997; Judge, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2004)—shape their orientations to life situations and events. Core self-evaluation is a higher-order construct that subsumes four underlying traits: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability (Judge et al., 1997). Past research has shown that core self-evaluations are positively associated with job satisfaction and performance (Judge & Bono, 2001). These relationships exist, at least in part, because employees with favorable core self-evaluations tend to approach the challenges they face as opportunities. They are realistic about and do not exaggerate the threats that such challenges represent, leading them to respond constructively. Building on this understanding, we propose that core self-evaluations moderate the effects of envy on behavior.

Our thesis is that, as core self-evaluations become more favorable, challenge-oriented action tendencies, as opposed to threat-oriented action tendencies, are more likely to be activated. This suggests that envious employees are more likely to behave constructively when their core self-evaluations are favorable. Although research on the moderating effects of core self-evaluation has been limited, the latent traits subsumed under this construct have been studied extensively. Thus, we focus on research pertaining to these underlying traits to develop our arguments.

In research predating the introduction of core self-evaluations into the organizational psychology literature, Buunk and colleagues argued that higher self-esteem, higher self-efficacy, lower neuroticism, and a more internal

(less external) locus of control should be associated with greater positive and less negative responses to upward social comparisons (Buunk et al., 1990; Van der Zee, Buunk, & Sanderman, 1996). In empirical studies of social comparison processes among cancer patients, these scholars found that patients high in self-esteem and low in neuroticism, recognizing challenge and opportunity, responded positively when comparing themselves with patients better off than themselves (Buunk et al., 1990; Van der Zee, Buunk, & Sanderman, 1996, 1998; Van der Zee, Oldersma, Buunk, & Bos, 1998). Replications of these studies in the workplace yielded very similar findings (Buunk, Van der Zee, & Van Yperen, 2001; Buunk, Ybema, Van der Zee, Schaufeli, & Gibbons, 2001).

The empirical findings reported by Buunk and colleagues show that the moderating effects of two dimensions of core self-evaluation—self-esteem and neuroticism—on the relationship between upward social comparisons and affective responses are robust. We argue that the implications of these moderating effects go beyond affect, through activated action tendencies, to shape behavior. For instance, research on self-enhancement motives and self-serving biases suggests that people respond to potential challenges or threats in ways that support and enhance their self-views (Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987). Based on this understanding, we would argue, for individuals with high self-esteem, that envy provides the impetus to engage in positive behaviors aligned with their favorable self-views (e.g., prosocial treatment of envied targets) and to suppress behaviors inconsistent with them (e.g., undermining envied targets). In contrast, for individuals low in self-esteem, envy drives reactive behaviors (reduced prosocial behaviors, increased social undermining) focused on alleviating their negative self-views and feelings of inferiority (Swann et al., 1987; Tracy & Robbins, 2003).

Individuals high in self-efficacy can be expected to respond to envy with prosocial behaviors directed at the envied target. Indeed, people with high self-efficacy are more willing to engage in prosocial behaviors because they feel that their efforts will increase the likelihood they will genuinely help others (Bandura, 1977). Furthermore, past research suggests that employees high in self-efficacy engage in prosocial behaviors (McAllister, Kamdar, Morrison, & Turban, 2007). Interpersonal helping is positively associated with reputation and status and, ultimately, performance (Flynn, 2003). In contrast, individuals low in self-efficacy are likely to perceive the envy experience as a threat. When feelings of anxiety and threat take hold, these individuals may be unwilling to provide assistance to and may be more likely to socially undermine envied targets.

Finally, past studies have shown that, relative to externals (people with external control beliefs), internals (people with internal control beliefs) are more inclined to approach situations of unfavorable social comparison as opportunities to learn and grow (Baron, Cowan, Ganz, & McDonald, 1974; Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). Thus, we would expect internals to respect and strive for the accomplishments of others without necessarily undermining envied coworkers. Indeed, we would also expect them to behave in ways that promote stronger relational bonds and enhance their reputation with envied targets. In contrast, because envy entails frustration at another's superiority, externals can be expected to direct their frustration at envied coworkers and seek ways to undermine their performance and outcomes. Furthermore, because they believe that there is little potential to increase their own performance or outcomes through effort, externals may attempt to address the perceived inequity by undermining envied targets.

In summary, favorable core self-evaluations—reflected through high self-esteem, high self-efficacy, internal locus of control, and emotional stability—strengthen challenge-oriented and weaken threat-oriented responses to envy and, thus, increase the likelihood of prosocial behaviors and reduce the likelihood of social undermining. Taken together, these observations suggest the following propositions.

> *Proposition 1a: The relationship between envy and prosocial behavior becomes increasingly positive as core self-evaluations become more favorable.*

> *Proposition 1b: The relationship between envy and social undermining becomes increasingly negative as core self-evaluations become more favorable.*

A similar line of reasoning provides substantiation for our view that more favorable core self-evaluations are associated with increased

job performance. We argued earlier that envy has implications for job performance because it is important in assessments of equity. We noted that equity can be restored either through reductions in job performance, provided that payoffs do not change, or through improved job performance that leads to better payoffs. From this perspective, observing other people's success (e.g., an envied coworker's success) can motivate employees to set higher performance standards for themselves and to allocate greater resources toward achieving those performance goals (Huguet, Galvaing, Dumas, & Monteil, 2000; Huguet, Galvaing, Monteil, & Dumas, 1999). However, we believe that this response is most likely to occur when envious parties have favorable core self-evaluations.

Research suggests that favorable core self-evaluations facilitate job engagement. Employees high in self-esteem have high performance expectations for themselves (Brockner, Derr, & Laing, 1987; Brown & Dutton, 1995). They tend to behave in ways that are consistent with their positive self-views (Korman, 1970), and they respond to negative feedback and setbacks with increased effort (Brockner, 1988; Shrauger & Sorman, 1977). Furthermore, research shows that individuals with high effort-performance expectancy show a greater intent to work harder when they are exposed to a superior colleague (Van Yperen, Brenninkmeijer, & Buunk, 2006). Given that high self-esteem is likely to be associated with high effort-performance expectancy, we expect that employees with high self-esteem will display greater motivation to perform better when they are exposed to an envied coworker. Employees high in self-efficacy also tend to be high performers at work and to persist in the face of setbacks (Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Judge & Bono, 2001; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Employees with an internal locus of control also share this quality of persistence in the face of negative feedback (Baron et al., 1974; Ilgen et al., 1979). Qualities such as these provide foundations for a challenge orientation to overcome perceived inequity.

When core self-evaluations are not favorable, research suggests that challenge-oriented responses are less likely to occur. Individuals with low self-esteem do not maintain high performance standards for themselves and are less assured of being able to overcome obstacles reflected in negative feedback (Brockner, 1988). A similar orientation emerges among employees with low self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992) and those who are externally rather than internally controlled (Weiss & Sherman, 1973). In addition, for employees high in neuroticism, negative feedback is a source of stress and anxiety (Muris, Roelofs, Rassin, Franken, & Mayer, 2005; Shaw, Creed, Tomenson, Riste, & Cruickshank, 1999). Ultimately, for employees who are not challenge oriented and who may be somewhat threat oriented, equity is restored primarily through decreased rather than increased contribution.

Overall, favorable core self-evaluations strengthen the challenge orientation, and this is likely to motivate increased job performance in response to envy. However, unfavorable core self-evaluations strengthen the threat orientation, and this is likely to drive decreased job performance in response to envy.

> *Proposition 2: The relationship between envy and job performance becomes increasingly positive as core self-evaluations become more favorable.*

**Referent cognitions.** Referent cognitions are an individual's perceptions of envied targets. Current research has focused on envious parties' perceptions of their similarity with the envied target (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004). However, referent cognitions are more complex than mere judgments of similarity. Research in social cognition suggests that people make inferences about others in their social worlds on two principal dimensions: warmth and competence (e.g., Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005). The warmth dimension encompasses qualities that pertain to perceived intent, including friendliness, helpfulness, sincerity, trustworthiness, and morality. The competence dimension captures qualities that pertain to perceived ability, including intelligence, skill, creativity, and efficacy (Fiske et al., 2007).

An employee's appraisal (i.e., referent cognitions) of an envied colleague's warmth and competence has direct implications for how that employee behaves in response to his or her feelings of envy. Individuals perceived as warm are often seen as being likable and pleasant to work with, and they tend to elicit positive affective and behavioral reactions from others (Fiske et al., 2007). Individuals perceived as competent tend to be respected by others for their abilities

(e.g., Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Spears, Ellemers, & Doosje, 2005), and they typically enjoy career success (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999; Schmidt & Hunter, 2004).

Because appraisals of warmth and competence are orthogonal (Fiske et al., 2002), we consider both dimensions in determining envy's overall effects on behavior. However, warmth judgments have primacy over competence judgments in affecting interpersonal behaviors after the experience of envy. We believe that this is so because research shows that competence is less relevant when people are perceived as lacking warmth (Casciaro & Lobo, 2008).

An employee who perceives an envied coworker as warm and competent is likely to react to the experience of envy positively, by helping and not undermining the envied coworker. There are three distinct reasons for this. First, the achievements of an envied coworker viewed as warm and competent are likely to be seen as justified. Consistent with what equity theory suggests, people feel less resentment when conditions of inequality are justified rather than arbitrary (Folger, Rosenfield, & Robinson, 1983). Second, by helping the envied coworker, the envious party has a greater likelihood of being included in the envied coworker's ingroup. This, in turn, may provide the envious party with an opportunity to be a part of a successful ingroup. Third, helping a high-status peer can elevate a person's social status since it provides a way for the envious employee to achieve the envied coworker's accomplishments. Although prosocial treatment of envied others may appear instrumental in nature, this behavior may also be driven by empathic concern and other-oriented motives when the envied party is perceived as both warm and competent (De Dreu, 2006; De Dreu & Nauta, 2009).

In contrast, an employee who perceives an envied coworker as neither warm nor competent is likely to react to the experience of envy in a negative manner, with increased social undermining and reduced prosocial behavior. These negative behaviors are rooted in feelings of resentment toward the target. Research shows that when people perceive the source of the inequality to be unjustified, such as an arbitrary criterion for distributing rewards, they harbor feelings of resentment (Folger et al., 1983). The envied target may then bear the consequences of such feelings. Furthermore, envious people cooperate less with advantaged colleagues when the advantage is perceived as being unjustified rather than justified (Parks, Rumble, & Posey, 2002). Taken together, this suggests the following propositions.

> *Proposition 3a: The relationship between envy and prosocial behavior is positive when targets are perceived as both warm and competent.*
>
> *Proposition 3b: The relationship between envy and social undermining is negative when targets are perceived as both warm and competent.*
>
> *Proposition 4a: The relationship between envy and prosocial behavior is negative when targets are perceived as neither warm nor competent.*
>
> *Proposition 4b: The relationship between envy and social undermining is positive when targets are perceived as neither warm nor competent.*

From an evolutionary perspective, it is more important for an organism to recognize whether another harbors ill will toward it than whether the other is competent to act on those intentions (Fiske et al., 2007). As a result, although referent cognitions concerning warmth and competence are both important, considerable evidence shows that judgments of warmth take precedence over judgments of competence (Fiske et al., 2007; Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998). Thus, envied targets perceived as competent but not warm are likely to elicit negative responses from others. That is, they are more likely to be viewed as ambitious and scheming (Peeters, 2002), and this, in turn, elicits more negative emotions (Spears et al., 2005). In other words, being competent does not seem to compensate for the lack of warmth. Rather, despite being competent, an individual who lacks warmth compromises his or her impression in the eyes of others.

In contrast with the other combinations of warmth and competence that, in varying degrees, elicit emotions of pity, admiration, and contempt, the combination of low warmth and high competence is more likely to elicit hostility (Cuddy et al., 2008) or even *Schadenfreude*, which is pleasure at another's misfortune (Smith

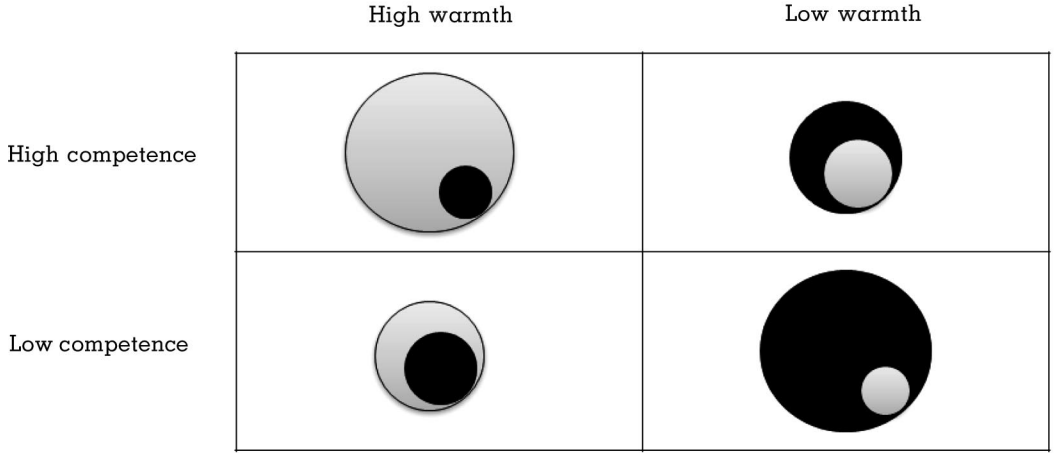
et al., 1996). As summarized in Figure 2, we propose the following.

> *Proposition 5a: The relationship between envy and prosocial behavior is more positive when targets are perceived as both warm and competent than when targets are perceived as warm but not competent.*
>
> *Proposition 5b: The relationship between envy and social undermining is more positive when targets are perceived as competent but not warm than when targets are perceived as neither warm nor competent.*

**Perceived organizational support.** Whereas referent cognitions are focused on the envied target, organizational support perceptions are directed at the organization. Perceived organizational support refers to employees' general perception of the extent to which the organization values their contributions and attends to their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Perceived organizational support is an experience-based attribution focused on organizational policies, norms, and procedures that affect employees. Empirical findings show that organizational support perceptions have a vital role to play in meeting employees' needs for esteem, approval, and social identity (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore & Shore, 1995). Perceived organizational support provides a foundation for mutually beneficial social exchange between employees and organizations (Eisenberger et al., 1986), with employees reciprocating support received in various ways, including greater job performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and organizational commitment (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore & Wayne, 1993). Although this line of explanation suggests that perceived organizational support has a direct effect on various work-related outcomes, we argue that it also moderates envy's relationship with job performance.

Employees who appraise organizational support as high believe that the organization cares for them and values their contributions (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). For these employees, organizational support is a source of encouragement when conditions of envy arise. Research has shown that unfair and inequitable treatment is one of the strongest predictors of perceived organizational support (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1998; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). We contend that employees high in perceived organizational support can be expected to view the superior standing of envied coworkers as well deserved—the result of a just system. In addition, these employees are likely to be confident that

**FIGURE 2**
**Effects of Referent Cognitions on the Relationship Between Envy and Prosocial Behavior/Social Undermining[a]**




[a] Gray circle represents prosocial behaviors. Black circle represents social undermining behaviors. Bigger circle corresponds to higher levels of the particular behavior, and vice versa.

the organization would similarly reward them if they were to perform better, which, in turn, should activate a challenge-oriented action tendency. Thus, for employees with high perceived organizational support, we would expect envy to be associated with increased job performance.

In contrast, employees who perceive organizational support as low do not believe that the organization either cares for them or values their contributions (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997). When employees perceive organizational support as low—as a consequence of experiencing unfair and inequitable treatment from organizational authorities (Moorman et al., 1998; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002)—they are likely to hold the organization, rather than themselves, responsible for their unfavorable situation. These employees are also likely to believe that the organization cannot be counted on to treat them in a supportive manner or to reward them, even if they increase their job performance to the levels of the envied coworker. Therefore, low perceived organizational support should activate threat-oriented action tendencies in response to envy. Thus, for employees with low perceived organizational support, we associate envy with decreased job performance. These observations suggest the following proposition.

> *Proposition 6: The relationship between envy and job performance becomes increasingly positive as perceived organizational support increases.*

## DISCUSSION

Our conceptual model of workplace envy provides new foundations for envy scholarship. We propose that envy is a homeostatic emotion characterized by pain at another's good fortune. This pain of envy activates both threat- and challenge-oriented action tendencies. Through these activated action tendencies, envy drives not only negative but also positive behavioral and organizational outcomes. The extent of envy's positive and negative effects is determined by core self-evaluations, referent cognitions, and organizational support perceptions—factors that moderate envy-to-outcome relationships by varying the strength and intensity of envy's action tendencies. Here we address key implications of this new perspective on envy for research and managerial practice.

### Implications for Envy Scholarship

Our research is aligned with recent work suggesting the potential for envy to be associated with positive as well as negative outcomes (van de Ven et al., 2009), and it clarifies the mechanisms by which increased envy can drive greater prosocial behaviors and job performance. We fully acknowledge that envy can and does activate threat-oriented action tendencies and negative behaviors (Smith & Kim, 2007). Our analysis suggests that such effects hold primarily where envious parties maintain unfavorable core self-evaluations, where those they envy are appraised as lacking warmth, and where the organizational context is considered unsupportive. But the view that these effects of envy are universal is untenable.

Within the organization sciences, conceptual work and empirical work have focused on envy's negative individual and organizational effects (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2004, 2006; Gino & Pierce, 2009a,b, 2010; Menon & Thompson, 2010; Moran & Schweitzer, 2008). We believe that this research, although valuable, may be perpetuating the traditional view of envy scholarship while excluding the potential for envy's positive effects and outcomes. This program of research may benefit from incorporating factors that moderate envy's relationship with negative outcomes, since this can provide a meaningful perspective on the underlying psychological processes at work. We believe that future work should examine the potential positive effects of envy in a work context.

Organizations are rife with situations in which employees experience negative consequences that they attribute to unjust treatment (Greenberg & Colquitt, 2005; Hughes, 2007; Leach, 2008). Especially where organizations are responsible for creating the conditions that give rise to envy, we are loath to conclude that envy leads only to negative behaviors, as suggested by the traditional view. Rather, we believe that envy may be a necessary affective condition that provides impetus for organizational citizenship focused on driving positive change in organizations (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Meyerson & Scully, 1995).

Our understanding of envy as an adaptive emotion is consistent with the perspective from

evolutionary psychology that envy can function as a signal that someone or something is obstructing one's course of action (Buss, 1989). Such an emotional response generates subjective distress, which motivates adaptive action to prevent future interference (Buss, 1989). Moreover, recent research shows that envious parties pay more attention to envied targets (Hill, DelPriore, & Vaughan, 2011). As an adaptation, the pain of envy, along with the attention it draws toward the envied target, may motivate people to expend effort to address the unfavorable situation (Hill & Buss, 2008), and this can lead to diverse behavioral responses. These include actions to diminish the relative advantage of an envied target (e.g., Elster, 1998; Smith, 1991; Zizzo & Oswald, 2001) and/or cooperative actions to increase one's inclusive fitness (e.g., Frank, 1999; Matt, 2003). In our view, those with favorable core self-evaluations will select the latter approach, with due consideration of the potential costs of doing so (Frank, 1985). Ultimately, as an adaptive emotion, envy serves to better equip people to address survival needs and to secure valued resources, thereby enhancing their inclusive fitness.

Our approach departs from current research arguing that benign and malicious envy are distinct constructs (van de Ven et al., 2009). Envy is a painful emotion, much like jealousy, guilt, and shame (Tangney & Salovey, 1999). Empirical evidence showing that shame is associated with either increased or decreased helping and job performance is consistent with our approach (Bagozzi et al., 2003). Although we might eventually learn that envy may exist in more than one form, we caution against construct proliferation before establishing that the full range of outcomes cannot be understood and explained with one definition, that the defining qualities of these constructs (e.g., pain as defining of envy) are present in each functional form, and that clear separation is maintained between each construct and its outcomes. We are concerned that the extent to which pain is actually present in benign envy has not been established empirically. Clearly, there is a need for empirical work to address competing claims in envy scholarship.

Consistent with the view that complex emotions are not easily aligned with any singular action tendency (Frijda, 1986), our model explains how it is possible for envious parties to display both positive and negative behaviors. Past empirical findings have shown that employees frequently receive both support and undermining from the same colleague (Duffy et al., 2002; Hobman et al., 2009). To date, however, there has been no explanation put forward for why people at work might behave in this apparently contradictory manner. Our framework suggests that prosocial behavior and social undermining are most likely both present when core self-evaluations are at intermediary levels—neither high nor low. Under these conditions both forms of behavior can reduce pain by restoring equity. For instance, while an employee's covert social undermining of a colleague may serve to bring the envied party down, the envious employee's presentation of him/herself as a prosocial helper may serve to raise the self.

We acknowledge that envy is an interpersonal phenomenon, and our analysis addresses only the behavioral implications for envious parties. It will be important to address the experience of being envied and its effects on behavior. Past research has highlighted the ambivalence associated with being envied: being the target of envy may be privately satisfying for a number of reasons, but it may also be a source of interpersonal strain (Exline & Lobel, 1999; Mosquera, Parrott, & de Mendoza, 2010; van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2010; Zell & Exline, 2010). The potential for positive interpersonal dynamics that follow from being envied has not been examined. However, our framework reveals that being envied can evoke a challenge orientation in the envious colleague, which may lead the individual to refrain from undermining and instead to provide prosocial assistance. If this is the case, feelings of being envied by others may be associated with increased felt responsibility and obligation to them, as well as greater commitment to sharing one's expertise, knowledge, and resources with them.

Research in neuroscience may also provide insight into how people subjectively experience the feelings of being envied. Recent research shows that the ventral striatum that is associated with reward processing is activated in social comparison episodes (Fliessbach et al., 2007). In their research Fliessbach and colleagues found that reward systems were more likely to be activated when a subject's payoff was greater than another party's and, thus, when the subject may have been the target of

envy. Interestingly, reward centers in the brain were less sensitive to absolute payoffs than to relative payoffs. This suggests that being envied may entail feeling pleasure, which is the opposite of pain. However, people may incur a cost for being the target of envy, since it opens up the possibility of being sabotaged and undermined by the envious party. This phenomenon has also not been explored within the organizational literature and is ripe for envy scholars to examine.

Our framework challenges envy scholars to focus on the substance of envy with greater precision. In order to achieve this, direct pain-based measures of envy must be developed. Within the field of medicine and clinical research, patient self-reports of felt pain on numerical rating scales and visual analogue scales are commonplace, and they are considered both appropriate and essential (Litcher-Kelly, Martino, Broderick, & Stone, 2007). Within the social sciences we have also seen increased use of self-report measures of pain. For instance, using numerical rating scales, Snapp and Leary (2001) measured feelings of being hurt by another person with self-report items capturing sensations of being "hurt," "wounded," and "crushed." Similarly, Priem, McLaren, and Solomon (2010) assessed pain with a four-item measure capturing appraisals of treatment that were experienced as being hurtful and emotionally painful. Self-report measures such as these may effectively capture the pain and hurt feelings that are central to the experience of envy.

Whereas our research focuses on the psychological experience of envy as pain, we see the potential for triangulation with assessment tools from psychophysiology (e.g., salivary assaying) and neuroscience (e.g., brain imaging). For example, recent research has shown that greater levels of oxytocin, a hormone associated with pair bonding, maternal behaviors (Lee, Macbeth, Pagani, & Young, 2009), and trust (Kosfeld, Heinrichs, Zak, Fischbacher, & Fehr, 2005), are associated with greater feelings of envy and *Schadenfreude* (Shamay-Tsoory et al., 2009). In another study Priem and colleagues (2010) associated hurt feelings with increased salivary cortisol—a hormone that is associated with stress—levels. In light of these recent findings, we encourage the use of salivary biomarkers to augment self-report measures of envy.

In neuroscience Takahashi et al. (2009) have established envy's role in the activation of the anterior cingulate cortex, a region associated with pain. Some recent evidence in psychology points to an ingenious way to reduce the effects of pain. DeWall and colleagues (2010) found that Tylenol™ reduces behavioral and neural responses associated with social pain. This points to the possibility of reducing envy through pharmacological means. Therefore, we believe that further clinical and neuroscience research might suggest new possibilities for managing envy.

Our focus on envy as pain, a psychosomatic experience driving a range of positive and negative outcomes through the activation of challenge- and threat-oriented action tendencies, provides a new starting point for envy scholarship. In the following sections we address important implications of our approach for organizational researchers and practitioners.

### Broader Implications for Research

In research on organizational justice, scholars have often used equity theory as one of organizational justice's foundations. Surprisingly, equity theory is silent on what strategies people may adopt to restore equity (Greenberg, 2010; Mowday, 1987; Pinder, 2008). Our model extends equity theory by suggesting that people may adopt a range of strategies to restore equity. It proposes that perceived inequity resulting from envy could lead people to respond in ways consistent with the challenge-oriented and threat-oriented action tendencies associated with envy. This suggests that when people experience envy, they may attempt to restore equity by increasing their inputs and/or reducing the other party's outputs, albeit indirectly. Our model provides some clues about when people may engage in the former versus the latter.

We believe that our framework can also be extended beyond envy among coworkers to address leader- and subordinate-directed envy. Employees may envy their leader's superior qualities, skills, and status. For their part, leaders may fear that their positions will be usurped by subordinates, and they may envy subordinates who display promise and the talent for potential leadership (Stein, 1997). We suggest that leaders and subordinates with favorable core self-evaluations are likely to respond to

envy in constructive ways, by increasing their job performance and engaging in prosocial behavior.

Although our model suggests that high core self-evaluations are generally beneficial, since they lead to positive outcomes, there may be an upper limit to this. Exceptionally high levels of core self-evaluation have been referred to as "hyper-CSE" (Hiller & Hambrick, 2005). People with hyper-CSE have inflated self-views, and they are neither open nor receptive to negative feedback (Hiller & Hambrick, 2005). Building on this understanding, we would argue that when leaders with hyper-CSE envy their subordinates, they are likely to respond negatively. These leaders are narcissistic and find it difficult to appreciate and enjoy the success of subordinates, and, thus, they are unlikely to foster or promote their development (Rosenfeld, 1987; Stein, 1997). To this end, narcissistic leaders can be expected to undermine envied subordinates they perceive as threats. Such interpersonal mistreatment may even extend to uncivil and abusive supervisory behavior.

In the domain of leadership, it will also be important to examine the dynamics of envy and leader-member exchange (LMX) differentiation. Bolino and Turnley (2009) have suggested that employees with low-quality LMX relationships experience feelings of relative deprivation compared to coworkers with high-quality LMX relationships. Thus, it is likely that employees with low-quality exchange relationships will envy coworkers with high-quality exchange relationships. These employees may not only be demotivated but may also engage in counterproductive behaviors that undermine the exchange relationships of envied coworkers. However, we do not expect all employees facing such situations to respond in this manner. That is, for employees with favorable core self-evaluations and where organizational support is strong, we would expect them to take proactive steps to improve the quality of their LMX relations.

Although envy is primarily understood as an interpersonal dynamic, we suggest that the dynamics of social identity may play an important role in affecting people's responses to envy. According to theories of social categorization and social identity, people make sense of their social worlds by grouping people into meaningful social categories (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Depending on whether the envied target is perceived to be an ingroup or an outgroup member, it is likely that the psychological experience of envy may differ. For example, individuals who envy an ingroup member may view the member as a potential role model, and this, in turn, may motivate the envious party to emulate and match the achievements of the envied target. This may activate a challenge-oriented action tendency in response to envy. In contrast, individuals who envy an outgroup member may feel resentful and might even experience *Schadenfreude* at the failure of the outgroup member (Feather & Sherman, 2002). This may activate a threat-oriented response to envy.

Our framework also highlights the centrality of organizational context as well as individual differences in the study of envy. Although we have primarily focused on individual-level variables in our model, we recognize that organizational structures, cultures, human resource practices, and leadership dynamics have powerful effects on employee self-views (Gardner & Pierce, 2004; Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, & Dunham, 1989; Tyler & Lind, 1992). Thus, in contrast to the determinism of the traditional and the alternative frameworks, we maintain that envy's effects on behavior can be shaped substantially by organizational environments and the leaders who create them.

Organizational contexts can alter how people perceive and react to the envy they feel toward others. People may attribute an envied target's desirable outcomes to organizational factors or to the target person's abilities and motivation (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001). For example, a salesperson might envy a coworker who has achieved greater sales in a quarter. Upon further reflection, the salesperson might determine that the coworker achieved higher sales because the organization provided the individual more resources (e.g., assigning the coworker a more promising sales territory or access to greater resources). In the absence of preferential treatment, the salesperson might attribute the superior performance to causes internal to the coworker, including his or her skill and effort. These attributions of responsibility are likely to influence whether the salesperson directs his or her response to the organization or to the envied coworker. This is consistent with research on retributive justice, which shows that employees target their negative behavioral responses to-

ward the source of injustice (Ambrose, Seabright, & Schminke, 2002; Lavelle et al., 2007).

Other organizational factors, such as physical or social distance, may also affect envy's effects on behavior. For instance, Liden and Antonakis (2009) have argued that leader distance (physical and social) may shape the processes by which leaders influence individual, group, or organizational outcomes. Similarly, we expect that distance from the envied target may also affect how envy is experienced and expressed. For example, experienced envy is likely to be greater when the envied target is physically close because the target is salient, immediate, and self-relevant. However, if the envied target is physically distant, this may reduce feelings of envy because the target is out of sight and out of mind. At the same time, this dynamic may have the unintended effect of reducing motivation to attain the level of performance that the envied target has achieved. In sum, we acknowledge the importance of contextual factors that might influence the expression of envy and its effects on behaviors at work.

Beyond the organizational context, we also recognize that the broader sociocultural context may shape people's behavioral responses to envy. Previous research shows that salespeople's experiences of shame as a consequence of customer actions are associated with different behavioral responses in independent cultures—for example, the Netherlands—versus interdependent cultures—for example, the Philippines (Bagozzi et al., 2003). While shame was adaptive in an interdependent culture, it was not so in an independent culture. This study points to the fact that the same emotional experience may manifest different effects across cultures. Much like shame in the study cited, envy may lead to more benign effects in an interdependent culture, since people value connectedness over uniqueness in such cultures (Singelis, 1994).

Our framework anticipates the potential for positive outcomes for employees as individuals and for their organizations. We bring a positive perspective to the study of envy, but the concept most central to the phenomenology of our work is pain, something people deem aversive if not negative. The emerging field of positive organizational scholarship (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Dutton & Ragins, 2007) has been criticized of late for its overemphasis on positivity to the exclusion of negative emotions and behaviors (Fineman, 2006). Indeed, among positive organizational scholars, pain appears best understood as an organizational problem to be overcome through compassionate responding (Frost, 2003; Kanov et al., 2004). However, we would contend that a positive psychology of work is incomplete without systematic incorporation of concepts such as envy, which is frequently associated with negativity. For instance, behaviors lauded in positive organizational scholarship—principled dissent (Worline & Quinn, 2003) and issue selling (Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Miner-Rubino, 2002), for instance—are often rooted in discontent, perhaps with an underlying sensation of pain. Just as important, we would maintain that activation of the challenge-oriented action tendencies associated with envy provide a baseline condition for subsequent excelling and thriving at work.

### Implications for Practice

The principal message that researchers have communicated to practicing managers is that the consequences of envy are primarily negative (Menon & Thompson, 2010). We contend that social dynamics associated with envy are everpresent and that managerial attention should be focused on cultivating a functional climate where envy's potent benefits can be realized. The ability to admire another's achievement is a crucial factor in perpetuating and sustaining the success of work teams. Employees who cannot celebrate and appreciate the accomplishments and qualities of their coworkers are denied an important source of satisfaction and fortification (Klein, 1975). Cohen-Charash, Erez, and Scherbaum (2008) have discussed *firgun*—the experience of being happy, envious, and supportive of others—and its positive relationship with organizational success. The Buddhist texts propose the development of qualities such as *mudita*—feelings of vicarious joy at another's success and good fortune. Where employees are unable to recognize the excellence and successes of coworkers, the positive effects of *firgun* and *mudita* cannot be realized. An employee-centered approach, which presumes that negative emotions are normal and expected rather than destructive and dysfunctional, would acknowledge that envy can play a functional and positive role in organizations (Bies & Tripp, 2002; Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004).

Our encouragement to managers is to be prudent and strive to create and maintain the conditions that facilitate envy's positive consequences. On the one hand, research documents the importance of fairness and justice in organizational settings (Greenberg & Colquitt, 2005), and our analysis suggests that organizations may be negatively affected if employees see organizations as being responsible for the conditions that cause envy. On the other hand, we contend that, beyond treatments of fairness, managers play a vital role in creating conditions for enhanced core self-evaluation and also fostering an environment where employees see the organization as being supportive.

## Conclusion

Our research on envy is premised on the understanding that the pain system may be adaptive and integral to human functioning (Brand & Yancey, 1993). This idea is nicely illustrated by a debilitating medical disease called leprosy. Until the late 1950s, leprosy was thought to be a disease that caused the rotting away of tissues, and it was deemed to be highly contagious. However, medical doctors today understand that it is the loss of surface pain sensations (i.e., the loss of the physiological warning system) that accounts for the destruction of limbs and the physical deformity associated with leprosy. Thus, the condition of leprosy suggests that physical pain serves as an important and adaptive physiological alarm that prompts self-protective action. Similarly, envy may also function as a psychological alarm that motivates people to address an unfavorable situation, albeit in different ways, and, in doing so, reduces the pain.

The empirical study of envy in the social and organizational sciences is in its nascent stages. Existing research appears skewed toward the negative effects of envy. Although extant research suggests that envy plays itself out negatively in many domains—from prejudice to personal unhappiness and possibly to mental health—we see good reason to believe that envy can be harnessed in a positive way for individual and organizational benefits. Our propositions provide an appropriate starting point for future inquiry, and we invite researchers to develop a more holistic understanding of workplace envy.

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