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Envy and Us

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Abstract

Within emotion theory, envy is generally portrayed as an anti-social emotion because the relation between the envier and the rival is thought to be purely antagonistic. This paper resists this view by arguing that envy presupposes a sense of us. First, we claim that hostile envy is triggered by the envier's sense of impotence combined with her perception that an equality principle has been violated. Secondly, we introduce the notion of "hetero-induced self-conscious emotions" by focusing on the paradigmatic cases of being ashamed or proud of somebody else. We describe envy as a hetero-induced self-conscious emotion by arguing (i) that the impotence felt by the subject grounds the emotion's self-reflexivity and (ii) that the rival impacts the subject's self-assessment because the rival is framed by the subject as an in-group member. Finally, we elaborate on the asset at stake in envy. We contend that this is esteem recognition: the envier covets the esteem that her reference group accords to the rival. Since, in envy, the subject conceives of herself as member of a group to which the other is also understood to belong, we conclude that envy is a social emotion insofar as it presupposes a sense of us.

Keywords: Envy, Self-conscious Emotions, Social Emotions, Group Identification

0. Introduction

Within emotion theory envy has been described as a purely individualistic emotion (see Schoeck, 1966): given the profound rivalry and hostility characterizing the emotion, envy has been claimed to exclude any sense of us. Yet, it has also been surmised that envy does have pro-social effects, although these effects are generally portrayed as a mere unintentional byproduct of the emotion. They can derive from envy avoidance: each individual, privately, has the intent to avoid being envied, thereby making their conducts more predictable and fostering uniform behavior (see Elster, 1989, p. 262). Or they can derive from the enjoyment one feels in being envied: each individual, privately, is motivated by the pleasure of being envied, thereby ending up "better off, not because they make an extra effort, but because of the extra effort of others" (Elster, 1989, p. 263). Or they are brought about because individuals, privately, are moved by episodes of envy against a target of the same kind, which fosters group cohesiveness (Freud, 1982). On this view, envy has even been labeled as "the cement" of society in the sense that society (understood as a mere aggregation of individuals) is glued together by the emotion.

The main aim of this paper is to resist the standard view about envy and to argue that envy presupposes a sense of us.[i] The paper is organized in three sections. In the first, we compare emulative or benign envy to hostile or malicious envy. We argue that the first expression refers to a combination of different attitudes (desire for an asset and admiration or happiness for its owner, see Ben Ze'ev, 2000, p. 353). By contrast, 'hostile envy' identifies a single kind of emotion, which can be characterized as a self-conscious emotion or an emotion of negative self-assessment, insofar as the emotion is intentionally directed to its very subject, who evaluates herself as disempowered or as a loser when compared to the rival. In the second

section, we elaborate on the structure of the emotion by pinpointing a second intentional relation, which the emotion enters with the rival. We highlight two phenomenological accents that the emotion can assume: when the accent is on hostility, the emotion is thematically directed at the rival and is non-thematically about the self. When the accent is on disempowerment, the converse is the case: the emotion is thematically directed at the self and is non-thematically about the other. This shows that, in envy, the other impacts the sense of self, which is a feature that envy shares with other self-conscious emotions, like shame and pride, when these emotions are induced by others. In the third and last section, we explore the idea that envy is group-based by looking at the third intentional relation this emotion enters with the desired good. We argue that a fundamental motive in envy is the desire to be esteemed by one's in-group members (or to nourish one's *amour propre*), which indicates that envy very much presupposes a sense of us, rather than marginally and unintentionally contributing to it.

A methodological note before starting: although some of the arguments that we mount in these sections take considerations about language into account, this investigation is not intended as a contribution to ordinary language philosophy, nor is its intention to issue recommendations on how to regiment language so as to make it fit to the view presented here. Rather, our interest primarily goes to the phenomenology and the intentional structure of the emotive phenomena at issue.

1. Envy as a hostile emotion

Let us begin by considering what we take to be a paradigmatic example of envy, which is not entirely fictitious. Imagine two ice-skaters from the same country, Rob and Bob, who are both training to compete in the Olympics. Both of them are of almost the same age and have been

proceeding in their sports careers at roughly the same pace. During the training sessions ahead of the Olympics, Rob comes to believe that Bob is in much better shape than him, and will certainly qualify for the competition, while Rob is very unlikely to qualify. Unable to bear the thought that Bob will get to compete in the Olympics, but Rob won't, Rob hires a man to break Bob's leg. This seems a clear case of an aggression motivated by envy: I wish something that somebody else has, and as a result I feel hostility towards the other.

Two questions arise. First, how representative of envy is this example, really? Or more precisely: can there be instances of envy without hostility? And second: how does hostility come about, or: why does the desire for a good trigger hostility against the owner of that good? The current section will offer answers to these two questions, but before tackling them, it may be helpful to start homing in on envy by rehearsing the distinction drawn in the literature between envy and jealousy.

Although the two terms 'envy' and 'jealousy' can often be used interchangeably in English (but this use is not permitted in other languages, e.g., in Romance languages like Spanish), there is increasing consensus that these two expressions refer to two distinct emotions (D'Arms, 2017; Protasi, 2017). Jealousy entails a relation among three persons: the subject, the beloved and the rival, whereas the persons involved in envy are only two: the subject and the rival. However, envy, too, can be described as entailing a three-place relation, insofar as the relation between the envier and the rival is mediated by a "good" that the rival possesses and the subject covets (see D'Arms, 2017, we conform to this terminology).[ii] Another crucial difference between these two emotions is that the object of jealousy (specifically: the affection of another person) is owned or enjoyed by the jealous subject, whereas this is *not* the case in envy. Jealousy is about protecting a privileged attachment you enjoy from someone who

threatens it, as is the case when a child gets jealous of a newborn sibling, because this baby now 'steals' some of the attention the child used to receive from their parents. Envy, by contrast, presupposes the desire of a good that is *not* owned by the subject, but by somebody else, i.e., the rival. Envy, therefore, is about coveting a good owned by the rival, like Rob desiring to have Bob's ability to qualify for the Olympics.

The word 'envy' has assumed extremely negative connotations because paradigmatic cases of envy involve overt hostility towards the rival. Indeed, the Christian tradition condemns it as one of the seven deadly sins. This might be one of the reasons why in some situations English speakers tend to use the word 'jealousy' instead of 'envy', thus signaling that they desire something someone else has, while highlighting that they feel no animosity towards the owner of the good. For example, you might tell a friend that you are jealous of them when you see their pictures of their beautiful beach holiday. If you do use the word 'envy' in such a situation, chances are you will use a joking tone, or be quick to clarify you mean no harm. Some languages signal this by using expressions such as 'healthy envy' ('envidia sana' in Spanish or 'sana invidia' in Italian).

These observations about language usage suggest that envy can come in a hostile and a non-hostile form, and indeed, the distinction between malicious and benign envy is frequent both in philosophy and psychology (van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2009; Smith & Kim, 2007). The question is whether these two phenomena can be classified as forms of the same emotion: are they both envy? This is disputed. Some philosophers argue that envy is always hostile to a higher or lesser degree (cf. D'Arms & Kerr, 2008; Ben Ze'ev, 2000, p. 304), and that so-called benign envy, if anything, is a different emotion. Some others think that envy can indeed come

in a non-hostile variety, often called ‘emulation’ (Kristjánsson, 2002, p. 139), ‘emulative envy’ (Protasi, 2016, p. 540), or ‘admiring envy’ (Neu, 1980, p. 433).

Our contention is that these two phenomena (benign and malicious envy) are quite distinct and deserve to be classified separately, and that the emotion of envy always involves hostility to a higher or lesser degree. To see why, let us compare both phenomena, which will also help us illustrate some of envy’s most important traits. Protasi (2016, p. 540) gives an example of what she calls ‘emulative envy’: PhD student Emma aspires to the same level of philosophical excellence as her advisor, Diotima, and (benignly) envies her for it. Protasi contends that this form of envy is characterized by squarely targeting the good, which is perceived as attainable, and striving to achieve it, without experiencing hostility or attempting to harm the rival, who functions only as a role model. In contrast, in our example above Rob perceived the good (qualifying for the Olympics) as unattainable, he felt hostile toward Bob and tried to harm him. The question here is whether the envy Emma is purported to feel towards Diotima, and the envy that Rob feels towards Bob, are different forms of the *same kind* of mental state. We do not think so. In our view, the cases that are typically classified as ‘benign envy’ are either instances of (hostile) envy that, for whichever reason, are very low in emotional intensity or involve a low degree of hostility, thus making it relatively easy for the subject to control it, manage it productively or even dismiss it. Or they are not envy at all, but a combination of different mental states (generally: admiration plus a desire for the good the other possesses).

To begin with, the what-it-is-likeness of hostile envy, its qualitative or phenomenological character (Nagel, 1974), cannot be equated to the what-it-is-likeness of benign envy. There is general agreement upon the idea that benign envy entails some form of positive or appreciative admiration—which certainly cannot be aligned with the spiteful note that qualifies envy—and

is said to be “only mildly aversive” (Protasi, 2016, p. 540) and not hostile towards the rival. If this is so, the absence of hostility can be held to constitute a crucial phenomenological difference. But on closer inspection, it is not so clear that ‘emulative envy’ does not involve hostility. Protasi (2016, p. 541) herself cites empirical evidence that benign, or emulative, envy is unpleasant, difficult to confess and is associated with shame. In our view, the association with shame and the difficulty to confess it both speak in favor of the idea that ‘emulative envy’ does involve some hostility towards the other: feeling hostility towards someone is in principle incompatible with admiring, respecting or loving them. This ambivalence in one’s feelings towards someone one holds dear can easily give rise to a meta-emotion of shame or guilt: shame about being the petty kind of person who envies those he also loves.

So far it might seem we are only stipulating that envy must involve hostility, which would easily invite the accusation that this move is question-begging (Protasi, 2016, p. 541). Hence, let us now ponder the possibility that benign envy is entirely free of hostility. Consider the following argument: envy is an intentional state and, as such, can be analyzed as having an intentional content and a ‘mode’ (Searle, 1983; or ‘manner,’ cf. Chalmers, 2004). If a dear friend comes into possession of an asset, this may instigate my envy, but also my joy. Here, the content of the emotions is the same, but their modes differ. But clearly, it is also possible for a subject to feel emotions of the same kind, but directed at different contents: I envy my neighbor’s car, but I also envy my friend’s generous character. Protasi (2016) has tried to trace the difference between malicious envy and benign forms of envy back to their contents: accordingly, the focus of benign envy would be on an achievable good, whereas malicious envy would focus on the rival. Yet, as we have seen, benign envy feels like radically differently from what hostile envy feels like – especially if we assume that no hostility at all is involved in the first emotion. Now, it has been claimed that the what-it-is-likeness of a state is

determined not only by the content, but also by the *mode* of this state (Zahavi, 2005, p. 116f) and perhaps predominantly so (cf. Teroni, 2017). Seeing *that it is raining* feels like different from seeing *that it is sunny*, but *seeing that* it is raining certainly also feels like differently from *wishing that* it is raining. If so, then the difference between these two forms of envy must also be assessed at the level of their modes and not (only) of their contents.

The question then arises of how the mode of these two different emotions can be described more precisely. It seems plausible to argue that the mode of benign envy (were this to completely lack hostility) results from the combination of admiration (or "happy-for", Ben Ze'ev, 2000, p. 353) and the desire for the good that someone else possesses. In particular, if somebody has achieved a good we also desire, and is believed to have done so by their own merits, this typically triggers our admiration. Especially if we know the person and care about them, this can also make us "happy for" them (see Ben-Ze'ev 2000, chap. 12). In this case, a three-place relation between a subject, a desired good and the owner of that good can be structurally parallel to envy, without involving any hostility. However, an unpleasant note may sometimes characterize episodes of benign envy (see van de Ven et al., 2009). Why? We surmise that this is caused by the desire component: desires that are not fulfilled are characteristically unpleasant (precisely because they are unmet). Yet, desires, whether painful or not, combined with admiration (or "happy-for") do not yet identify a single kind of mental state. Put another way, the association (as strong as one wishes) between two mental states is not itself a mental state. But then what about the mode of hostile envy? How is this mode to be described?

To find an answer to this question, let us look more closely at the desire that underlies envy. On a widely-accepted view (see Davidson, 2002), desires motivate to act when coupled with

beliefs – and especially, with the belief that the good is achievable: if a good is deemed to be achievable, generally the subject attempts to acquire it. Clearly, the strategy that the agent will put in place very much depends on many different factors: on the character of the person, on the sort of good at stake, on the circumstances related to its attainment, etc. Developing a virtue like generosity (which you conceive of as an asset that, e.g., your colleague has) presupposes a very different course of actions from reaching the goal of publishing a paper on a top-rated journal (like the one your colleague recently published). Yet both goods, at least in principle, can be regarded by the agent as achievable. Also, the moral profile of the strategy may differ: the good can be acquired thanks to the agent's personal effort alone or it can be acquired as a result of morally blameworthy actions. For instance, the agent may steal the good from its owner and, consequently, harm the owner.

It may be helpful to dwell on this last scenario a bit longer: suppose that, in the morally problematic case, the owner also happens to be the target of the agent's hatred. In this case, it obviously makes a difference whether the harm (stealing something from somebody else) is inflicted *because* of the malicious intention of achieving the good or *because* of hatred. To come back to our initial example: it makes a difference whether Rob breaks Bob's leg because Rob thinks that, by eliminating his main rival, he can qualify for the Olympics, or whether he does that simply because he hates Bob (maybe knowing that this will not enable him to be qualified). Certainly, the action can be triggered by both mental states at once and in many real-life cases it would be almost impossible to precisely discern the motivating factor. Yet the important point is that, if the action is motivated by hatred, then hatred itself must be motivated by something different from the mere desire for the good, were hatred to be qualified as envy. In fact, it remains unintelligible why the mere desire for something owned by somebody else in and of itself may lead to (envious) hostility against the good's owner (unless one is willing

to claim that envy is always and intrinsically irrational – but nobody in the debate, as far we can see, holds this view[iii]). Think again about Bob and Rob, but now in a different situation: if Bob desires the same car Rob has, and Bob is able to afford it and buy it (or steal it!) at any time he chooses, it would be difficult to see why Bob's desire for Rob's car should trigger any hatred or hostility towards Rob. So, what motivates the (alleged) component of hatred in envy?

The conjecture is that envy is triggered by a feeling of impotence on the subject's end (Scheler, 1994) combined with a similarity condition. More specifically, the subject's desire to possess the good is *frustrated* by the feeling that she cannot achieve it, while she witnesses that someone very similar to her can. There might be various causes for this feeling of impotence (which may or may not be justified): e.g., the subject may know that the good is a numerically non-repeatable entity (like winning the Gold medal in one specialty at the Olympics) or she may be convinced that the reason why she does not possess the good is because the rival has it. Also, she may believe that the reason why she does not possess the good is due to systemic factors such as injustice or destiny, etc. This unachievability, however, is experienced by the envious subject as contingent, not as necessary: given my merits, if the world were different, I could be the one that had the good (Elster, 1998, p. 169; Smith & Kim, 2007, p. 51). Indeed, the fact that the rival - somebody so similar to me - possesses the good just goes to show that someone like me can have it. But something blocks my way at the moment and I feel impotent. Obviously, the subject may be wrong in experiencing the good as unachievable, but what counts is that the feeling of impotence *conduces to* a characteristic pattern of counterfactual inferences that is premised on an equality principle.[iv] These inferences can be formulated loosely as follow:

Given the equality principle:

(1) *If* it were true that the other has achieved the good in virtue of his/her merits, *then* it should have been possible for my desire for the good to be satisfied.

(2) *But* (I believe that) my desire for the good cannot be satisfied, *therefore* it must be the case that the other does not own the good in virtue of his/her merits.

To elaborate on this: if, in envy, the good is thought to be achievable, then the desire for it should motivate the subject to act and it would remain unexplained why the agent develops hostility against the owner. By contrast, the profoundly painful and disturbing quality of envy can be explained by the tension between the individual desire for a good owned by somebody else and the feeling of impotence in securing that good. Yet, this tension per se would not be able to explain the hostility felt against the rival (and indeed, if the other is perceived as thoroughly and deservedly superior, envy is far less likely to appear, Smith & Kim, 2007, p. 51). The crucial elements to explain hostility here are, hence, desert and the violation of the equality principle: if the other deserved the good, I should have deserved it too. After all, there is no difference in status between me and the other. But the good is beyond my reach, so the other does not deserve it either, for the other hasn't acquired it thanks to his or her merit. And that is why the rival is begrudged and target of hostility. Furthermore, as Aristotle suggests (Rhet. II 1388a), envy reaches its peak of unpleasantness when the subject, in addition to feeling impotent, also feels hopeless that the world will ever sustain their desire for the good. Protasi (2016, pp. 541-543) seems to agree, given her description of 'inert' envy.

Does this make envy a moral emotion? There is a complex ongoing debate between those who think that envy is not a moral emotion, that it is immoral or at best neutral (see e.g., D'Arms, 2017; Ben-Ze'ev, 2002, 1992), and those who think that envy is a moral emotion, because it requires a sense of justice and a motivation to remedy injustices or inequalities (Thomason,

2015; La Caze, 2001). We do not want to enter this debate, but it is important to emphasize that the way in which the notion of equality enters into the picture here is entirely perspectival, so to speak. The subject assesses a given state of affairs as unequal not from an objective point of view, but from her individual perspective. This is nicely captured by Miceli and Castelfranchi: "[…] a special kind of inequality is likely to motivate the envier's feeling: his own inequality, which should consist in his own inferiority. Were he the advantaged one, we doubt he would feel indignation at the sight of this unequal distribution." (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2007, p. 461).[v] To push this line of reasoning further, even if (objectively) the rival achieves the good because of his merit (and hence deserves the good), the subject will still consider the other a target of hostility – precisely because the subject does not possess the good, which instigates the inference that, if the other owns the good, it would be fair (from the subject's own perspective, that is!) for him or her to be in a position of owning it, too. But since this possibility is precluded to the envier, it is subjectively unfair for the rival to own the good.[vi] The same can be said for cases in which the rival achieves the good by mere luck and thus has no direct responsibility in its acquisition – here again, not possessing the good is taken as the premise of a similar pattern of inferences.

All this establishes that envy presupposes the desire for a good that is regarded as unachievable by the subject and it also necessarily involves hostility against the rival. Often, this hostility is cashed out in terms of the desire that the rival loses the good, which can motivate the subject's aggressive behavior. Certainly, this desire represents an important element of hostility, but it is not the only one: given that the *other as such* is the target of hostility, whatever harm or injury suffered by the rival is likely to trigger *Schadenfreude* in the subject (see van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, Smith, & Cikara, 2015). The main point of envy is not necessarily depriving the other of the good, but rather that "one wants to lower the other (to one's own level or below)"

(Neu, 1980, p. 343) through any available means. Accordingly, envy can dissolve when the other, while still owning the asset, suffers a harm that is perceived by the subject to be disproportionate with respect to the (perceived) offence of possessing the good without merit.

But then, could not one run the same argument used above against the idea that benign envy identifies a single kind of mental state? Couldn't envy be accounted for in terms of a combination of the desire for a good that is not currently possessed by the subject and by hatred or ill-will against the rival? If that were the case, then neither benign envy nor malicious envy would pinpoint a single kind of mental state. The following section develops considerations in favor of the idea that envy does identify a single kind of emotion.[vii]

2. Envy as a hetero-induced self-conscious emotion

First, envy can certainly ground hatred: consider, e.g., the phenomenon of class hatred, where certain people are hated because—at least on some interpretation—they belong to a class of envied people (the bourgeois, say). But if one emotion can motivate the other, then hatred – as a specific emotional response towards the other – must differ from envy. *Secondly*, and more importantly, the intentional structures of hatred and envy are drastically different: there is widespread agreement in the literature that hatred is directed against the other in the light of the disvalues that he or she exemplifies.[viii] The other is hatred's intentional object and this makes the mental structure of this emotion relatively simple. Envy is a much more complex affair given that, we submit, the self is invested in this emotion: "Envy pertains to the idea that we have of ourselves, what makes our difference, our identity, it touches us at our very core." (Rochat, 2014, p. 39; referring to Moessinger, 2000; see also Parrott, 1991; Ben-Ze'ev, 1992). To understand why, let us go back to the sense of impotence mentioned above.

Once the subject develops a feeling of impotence with respect to the achievement of the good, the presence of the good in the hands of the rival reveals to the subject her own *relative* inferiority, or her disempowerment, with respect to the rival. This feeling of disempowerment is a form of negative self-assessment, which implies self-awareness. This is conducive to the idea that envy, in contrast to hatred, ought to be regarded as a "self-conscious emotion." The label "self-conscious emotions" refers to the fact that these emotions intentionally target the self of the emoter.[ix] That is, in envy the subject is intentionally directed at the very envier, and not only at the rival.[x]

Self-conscious emotions like shame and pride are characterized by the fact that these emotions are of or about the self: what is evaluated in these experiences is the one that has them (see Tracy, Robins & Tangney, 2007). Imagine the first mate of a sinking ship (like the main character of Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*) who abandons it in terror, instead of doing his duty and staying behind to make sure all the passengers are safely evacuated, and once he arrives on firm land, he feels deeply ashamed of his own cowardice. His shame is not simply directed at the act of abandoning the ship; he is ashamed *of* himself *because* he abandoned the ship. He evaluates himself negatively (he is the target of the emotion) in light of the situation that caused his shame. Similarly, envy has a self-conscious structure, where the emoter evaluates him- or herself negatively in light of a comparison with the rival: the envier feels disempowered or disadvantaged with respect to the rival because he or she is impotent with respect to the acquisition of the asset.[xi]

If this line of reasoning is on the right track, then there is a reason for claiming that, in contradistinction to benign envy, the expression 'malign' envy *does* identify a single kind of

emotion:[xii] it is because malign envy is a self-conscious emotion, that it cannot be reduced to a mere combination of unsatisfiable desire and hatred. The two intentional states of desire and hatred are not (necessarily) about the self and do not (necessarily) involve any self-evaluation, whereas envy always is about (among other things) a self that is assessed as disadvantaged.

Yet, the idea that the self plays a role in the intentional horizon of envy asks for further clarification. We have seen that the self-assessment involved in envy – more precisely: the sense of disempowerment attached to the emotion – is grounded in a comparison with the rival. We shall uncover the preconditions of this comparison in section 3, but for the time being let us focus on the cognitive and emotive result of this comparison, as it were: Bob has a good that Rob feels is not in a position to achieve. Whatever the source of this feeling of unachievability may be, Rob is confronted with the brute fact that Bob has something Rob literally does not and (believes) cannot possess. Rob is therefore impotent and Bob is a target of hostility.

The dialectic between disempowerment and hostility provides envy a Janus-faced intentional structure. More precisely, it puts the *target* and the *focus* of the emotion in oscillation. We understand the notions of 'target' and 'focus' of an emotion in line with Helm's account (Helm, 2010, p. 58). The target of the emotion is its intentional and thematic object – if you fear a barking dog, the barking dog is the target of fear. The focus, by contrast, is the background non-thematic object having import to which the target is related in such a way as to make intelligible the target's having the property defined by the formal object: if you fear a barking dog, the focus is on you and your well-being. It is because your well-being is threatened by the dog that the dog's dangerousness is intelligible (and the emotion of fear justified). The focus of concern must not always lie on the emoting subject, though: if you observe a dog barking at

a child in a park, your emotion of fear has the dog as its target, but the child and his well-being as its focus.

In the light of the distinction between focus and target, we conjecture that envy has two phenomenological accents: when the accent is on hostility, then the rival is the target of the emotion. The subject's thematic consciousness is about the rival, but the peripheral or non-thematic consciousness is about the self, which is the background object of the emotion. Envy, in this case, is made intelligible by the sense of impotence. The more one feels impotent, the more the other is resented. Envy's second accent is on disempowerment and the associated localized negative self-assessment: here, the emotion has the self in target position and the rival in the focus: it is in virtue of the rival's (perceived) superiority that the negative evaluation about the self is made intelligible.[xiii]

The investment of the self in both accents of envy can also provide an explanation of a feature that has been often remarked as a trademark of malign envy, because it is not displayed by benign envy. This is the fact that, whereas the subject generally does not experience any or only little psychological friction in reporting emulative envy, the psychological tendency in malicious envy is to keep the emotion hidden, to not report it, and to transform it so as to avoid acknowledging it even to oneself (see Smith & Kim, 2007, pp. 54-57). Moreover, when envy is imputed to the subject by a third party, the subject reacts with overt denial or shame (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2007), if not anger. We gather that the reason for this tendency consists in the fact that making envy manifest or being addressed as an envious person literally unveils the self and the negative self-assessment under which it has been put. In particular, it reveals to others that the subject not only assesses herself as disempowered, as a loser, but also that she

assigns importance and relevance to the rival in assessing herself (and this notwithstanding the fact that the rival is begrudged).

Furthermore, another fact can provide the current proposal with more persuasive power: other self-conscious emotions show an intentional structure of a complexity similar to that of envy. They can be hetero-induced in the technical sense that one's own self-assessment can be based on facts about others (other authors would refer to these emotions as 'vicarious') (see Salice & Montes Sánchez 2016).[xiv] In particular, shame and pride are emotions that can be easily induced by others in this sense: in great many cases, one feels shame or pride not only because of what one has done, but also because of what somebody else has done. The other, that is, is able to impact the sense of self so as to make it possible that the subject feels ashamed or proud of what the other has done (hence affecting the corresponding self-assessments). In these emotions, one can observe the same intentional structure ascribed above to envy. This structure is not only concerned with the very self of the emoting subject, but also with the other (see Salice & Montes Sánchez 2016). Just as in envy, so in hetero-induced pride and shame, too, one can observe an oscillation between the non-thematic and the thematic object of the emotion: in some cases, the emotion of hetero-induced pride (or shame) is more centered on the subject, while, in others, it is more centered on the other. For instance, consider cases in which a fan feels proud of herself because her sport team has won the match: the fan generally attempts to underline the fact that she is the one who supports the winning team. In other cases, however, it is the other who plays a more ostensive role. To see this, consider how parents feeling proud of their children, while talking to other parents, direct the hearers' attention to their children rather than to themselves. Whereas in the first example the phenomenological accent of the emotion is put on the subject, in the second case, the accent is put on the other.

Given the close similarities between envy and other self-conscious emotions, our interim conclusion is that envy is a hetero-induced self-conscious emotion in line with hetero-induced shame and pride. For envy, too, as we have highlighted above, is characterized by the fact that the self is evaluated in the light of the other. However, this is not to deny important differences between hetero-induced shame and pride, and envy. The main difference between these emotions is that it is not possible for envy to come about in a non-hetero-induced form (but this is certainly the case in shame and pride). Also, in hetero-induced pride and shame, the way in which I evaluate myself parallels the way in which I evaluate the other, but this does not apply to envy. In envy, the evaluation of myself and of the other are not aligned: my negative evaluation of myself as impotent to achieve a good can coexist with a positive evaluation of the rival as empowered to achieve that good.[xv]

Despite these differences, the clear analogy between these emotions directly leads to a further thought: one promising way to understand hetero-induced shame and pride is by assuming that the emoting subject has "group-identified" with the shameful or admirable other (see Salice & Montes Sánchez, 2016; Montes Sánchez & Salice, 2017). To put this differently, since the subject conceives of herself as a member of the same group to which the other is also perceived to belong, the other's actions gain relevance for the subject. By conceiving of herself as group member, the subject acquires a social identity or a social self (a representation of oneself as group member) and, hence, one important presupposition for the occurrence of hetero-induced shame and pride is the capacity of the self to assume a distinctly social identity. Hence, these emotive reactions are intrinsically social and presuppose a sense of us. If applied to envy, this observation opens up a seemingly contra-intuitive possibility: if hetero-inducement has to be linked to sociality and if envy is an essentially hetero-induced emotion, does it follow that envy is a social emotion that requires for its occurrence a sense of us? This view flies in the face of

the deep-seated intuitions we mentioned in the introduction, but we think there are good reasons for revising those individualistic intuitions. It is to this issue that we turn in the next section.

3. Envy as a group-based emotion

We put forward two considerations for showing that envy presupposes a sense of us and, hence, that it belongs to the class of group-based emotions. The first line of reasoning aims at unveiling that explicit or direct group identification is a factor that can trigger envy when it is combined with the other factors mentioned in the previous Sections. The second line of reasoning invokes the notion of implicit or indirect group identification and purports to show that this form of identification is always present when envy is elicited.

The first consideration takes its first step from the idea mentioned in section 2 according to which envy presupposes comparison: for envy to be triggered, Rob must compare himself with Bob. The idea that comparison is quintessential to envy is fairly uncontroversial in the literature, and it is largely recognized that comparison tracks similarity (Rhet. II 1388a). The subject, through comparison with the other, becomes aware of similarities that justify the application of the equality principle when assessing the other and the other's possession of the good. It is because Rob is similar to Bob that Rob thinks he is entitled to be qualified to the Olympics - just as Bob is.

Yet similarity alone is not enough. On the one hand, similarity is cheap and everywhere. In Davidson's (1978) words, "all similes are true… because everything is like everything". But then what are the factors that assign relevance to one specific relation of similarity and not to

others? On the other hand, it is generally assumed that similarity comes in degrees and envy is triggered only if the similarity between individuals is relatively high. The psychological tendency being that, when comparison detects low similarity between the subject and the other, the subject will not feel envy towards the other. For instance, Rob would not be envious of gold-medalist Bob, were Rob not an ice-skater, but only an ice-skating fan. Yet, it seems perfectly possible that low-level similarity can be superseded by other factors: in the example, were Rob and Bob siblings, it would be much more likely for Rob to indeed develop envy towards Bob, despite the large objective dissimilarity between their athletic abilities.

If this is on the right track, it indicates that *objective* similarity as such is not able to account for the elicitation of envy (cf. Schmid, 2012, p. 425). What matters are rather the elements that assign salience to certain relations of similarity rather than others. Now, we surmise that one such element is the subject's construal of the other as an in-group member. Framing the other as an in-group member assigns salience to given similarities - regardless of how loose or narrow these similarities are. In fact, one could even hypothesize that the less intense the similarity is, the more intense the social identification with the other must be for this similarity to motivate envy (as the example with Rob and Bob shows).

Framing the other as an in-group member requires the subject to have group-identified. To frame somebody else as an in-group member presupposes that the subject already understands herself as a member of that group: call this understanding a 'social self' (see Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Importantly, the activation of a social self precisely is what the psychological process of group identification delivers (Turner, 1982). Note that, in line with the notion of group identification in social psychology, the form of group membership we are interested in here is subjective, not objective. One can be member of several groups in virtue of, e.g., institutional

factors (such as having a UK passport or being a first-year philosophy student) without the subject identifying with those groups, sometimes without the subject even being aware of those memberships. Yet, this does not amount to the "subjective" or psychological group membership social psychologists are interested in. By contrast, it is precisely when the subject has acquired an understanding of herself as member of a social group (us) and, hence, has group-identified, that social identity becomes an integral part of the self-concept and that the subject displays a social self. When the subject's sense of self is impacted in this way, a subjective form of group membership is established: "we are concerned here with group membership as a psychological and not a formal-institutional state, with the subjective sense of togetherness, we-ness, or belongingness which indicates the formation of a psychological group" (Turner, 1982, p. 16). Hence, whether the rival *actually* is an in-group member is only peripherally relevant to envy somebody. What matters rather is how the subject understands herself and the other.

Intense research in social psychology over the past fifty years has ascertained that this process can be elicited with great ease. It suffices that the subject perceives certain group cues in the environment - such as belonging to the same social category, having common interests, sharing common fate, facing a competing group, employing we-language etc. (Bacharach, 2006, p. 76) - for this process to set off. That is, to frame somebody as in-group member does not require the subject to have activated a particularly complex cognitive machinery, which is conducive to the developmentally early onset of the emotion.[xvi]

But now, if it is true that one factor able to trigger envy is similarity, *when* this is accompanied by subjective group membership, it is also true that this is only *one* fact. Meaning that there are no sufficiently cogent reasons for maintaining that group identification is the only *one* factor

that contributes to the elicitation of envy by assigning salience to certain relation of similarity. Other factors can and do play a role as well (see Alicke & Zell, 2008). This suggests that group identification can trigger envy, but also that there could be episodes of envy that do not hinge on a sense of us. At this stage, our second consideration can come to the fore.

Recall that envy puts the subject in a ternary relation: the emotion is about the self, but it also is about the other and about the good. Given the high variability of the goods that can be at stake in envy (material objects, character's traits, etc.), the attempt of developing a taxonomy of those goods may appear as hopeless (but see Klages, 1924, p. 118ff, for an attempt). Yet, one may ask about the *reasons* that the subject has for his or her preoccupation with a particular good. Why, in other words, a particular material, abstract or spiritual object catches the attention of the subject? It seems rather unproblematic to contend that this has to do with the fact that the object exemplifies particular values.[xvii] The object is desired because of certain values that it is perceived to exemplify (or: the object is evaluated positively by the subject).

But which values are at stake here? Certainly, the object must have intrinsic desirability, but we surmise that the values that are core to envy are not the values that the object bears per se, intrinsically. This is illustrated by two psychological facts. The first is the tendency of the subject to destroy the other's assets when they cannot be gained: as we have seen, the hostility that infuses envy often manifests itself in a desire to destroy the assets had by the rival. For example, when a child breaks another child's toy because he cannot get it, or, in a more indirect or repressed way, when an envious neighbor scratches in passing your brand-new sports car with the keys of her cheap second-hand car. The thought behind such actions would be, "if I can't have it, neither should you". Recall Dorothy Sayers' (1943) much quoted sentence: "Envy is the great leveler: if it cannot level things up, it will level them down". The motivation for

destroying or damaging the asset derives from the intention to harm the rival or bring her down to one's own level by any means available, but we think that, if the preoccupation about the good were grounded solely in the values that the object bears per se, this would create a constant and solid counter-motive against the destruction of the good. The second fact is the associated tendency to *reject* the good once this has become available to the subject – a tendency that is most visible in children's behavior: when, finally, they are offered the good desired and owned by some of their peers, it is not uncommon to observe that children refuse it. Here, again, it would remain unexplained why the subject is willing to give up on the asset, if its values are the only aspects at stake in envy.

So, if the intrinsic values of the good are not (at least, the sole) element that the subject is concerned with in envy, then what are the other relevant values here? We believe that these are the values that ensure or increase social recognition, the values that can alter a person's "level" vis-à-vis others. Now, recognition is a notoriously complex notion (see Iser, 2013) and, according to one particularly influential view, it comes in at least three different forms: respect, love, and esteem (Honneth, 1995). What sense of recognition is core to envy?

The concept of recognition, as it is generally used in political philosophy and the philosophy of law, is a moral notion and it mostly refers to *respect*: the recognition of a person's dignity and autonomy. As Neuhouser (2008, p. 62) puts it, respecting others "involves recognizing their fundamental dignity as human beings—as beings whose interests and desires place moral constraints on others' actions". This is not the good most relevantly at stake in envy. The absence of recognition in the sense of respect—think about marginalized groups, like African illegal immigrants or asylum seekers in Europe, or the homeless—typically produces feelings

of humiliation rather than envy. Envy is much more likely to arise between people like Bob and Rob, both of whom enjoy respect recognition and are competing for something else.

What about recognition in the sense of love? Is it relevant for envy? One can certainly desire to be loved and envy those who are loved (this might be an intuitively plausible explanation of sibling rivalry, for example), but if what you really desire is genuine love (and not something else), then bringing the rival down won't do the job. Leveling will not satisfy you in any way. The only thing that can satisfy our longing for love is achieving genuine love for oneself, and this doesn't depend on the rival. Therefore, we submit that love cannot be the form of recognition that is central to envy.

In our view, what is predominantly relevant for envy is *esteem* recognition. As Neuhouser (2008, p. 62) puts it, "to esteem someone is to regard him as worthy of praise, admiration, or emulation for some specific quality or achievement. Unlike respect, esteem is not a recognition of rights that individuals enjoy in virtue of possessing a certain status (as beings of a certain sort) but a valuing of persons that involves a positive appraisal of the esteemed person's particular qualities or achievements". What is at stake in envy is what Neuhouser (2008, ch. 1), following Rousseau, calls *amour-propre*. *Amour-propre* is a form of self-love that depends on what others think of you; it involves the desire to be admired or valued, "to have a certain standing in relation to the standing of some group of relevant others" (Neuhouser, 2008, p. 32). This is nicely illustrated in an interview with O.J. Simpson, where he says: "There's a lot of things I need as a person. You know. I need, uh… I need that recognition. I think that, uh, what… what is driving O.J. Simpson is that need to be number one, that need to be liked. That need to be said, 'Hey, that's O.J. Simpson!' When I walk down the street, I want people to

know me" (Edelman, 2016). This, we contend, is the kind of recognition at stake in envy[xviii]: what one desires is the esteem associated with possessing certain goods.

Thus, in our view, there are two assets that play a role in envy: a superficial and a deep asset. The superficial good one strives for in envy exemplifies values that are assessed as relevant from the perspective of the envier's group (those values are the values of the group, cf. Schmid, 2012, p. 430) to the effect that owning a good that exemplifies those values delivers peers' esteem recognition. The superficial good has symbolic valence: the subject desires the good not (or at least: not exclusively) in its own right, but rather for the esteem that it can secure. We believe that this can neatly explain the two tendencies mentioned above: by destroying the good, the subject aims at depriving its owner of the esteem that the good ensures. By contrast, once esteem has been achieved when the asset has been eventually offered to the subject, this suffices for the emotion to dissolve, given that the desire for the deeper asset (esteem, that is) is now fulfilled. Hence, even though on a superficial level one can ascertain a plurality of goods from which envy can be moved, on a deeper level, the ultimate good at stake seems to be only one, namely, esteem recognition.

This has an important consequence for the understanding of the emotion. The fact that the rival enjoys a good that has values recognized as important by the subject's in-group members implicitly assigns social relevance to the rival. In fact, the rival – insofar as she enjoys the esteem of my in-group thanks to the possession of the good – is framed as an in-group member. The subject does not directly group-identify with the rival here, but because the rival is perceived as receiving esteem recognition from the subject's in-group, the rival is also perceived as being a member of that in-group. For example, imagine that Nora, who belongs to one minority in the country where she lives, feels envy for her next-door neighbor Sana, who

is a member of a different minority. Sana enjoys a better-paying job and a better social position than Nora, which signals to Nora that the society where they live confers a higher status to Sana's group as opposed to Nora's. In this example, Nora is framing Sana explicitly as an out-group member, but at the same time she is implicitly taking both Sana and herself as members of the same referential in-group, as far as social esteem is concerned. But then, even if in an indirect and implicit way, the subject does group identify with the other – she does understand herself as a member of the same group to which the other belongs.

The idea that group identification can come in different forms is not new in social psychology, where it has been ascertained that group identification comes in degrees, which have an impact on our affective life - for instance, on how we feel social or collective emotions (Brewer, 1991; Smith, Seger, & Mackie, 2007). This idea has also been accommodated in the debate about collective intentionality, where difference in 'degrees' is replaced by a conceptual distinction between two different ways in which one can understand oneself as member of a group: either one can be a we-mode member or a pro-group I-mode member (Tuomela, 2007). The main idea being that, whereas a 'we-moder' is somebody who adopts a we-perspective (hence framing the world and acting from the perspective of her group), the pro-group-I-moder is somebody who acts, emotes and reasons from an I-perspective, while taking into consideration a concern for her group in her action, reasoning and emotions.

These various distinctions parallel our talk of direct and indirect group identification. Being in the we-mode appears to be an important condition for envy: when there is low similarity between the envier and the rival, envy can be explained by the fact that the emoter perceives the world from the we-perspective. Accordingly, the other is directly framed as an in-group member – in doing so, the similarity gap is bypassed and salience is assigned even to low

similarities. Yet, being in a pro-group-I-mode is always required for envy: not only the agent emotes based on a concern that fundamentally relates to her group, i.e., by the desire of being esteemed by her group. But also, she implicitly understands the other as an in-group member, as someone, that is, who – by excelling at exemplifying the values cherished by the group to which the subject belongs - enjoys its esteem recognition. Consequently, the emotion can be described as group-based: envy is a social emotion in the sense that it presupposes a sense of us.[xix]

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we have defended three closely interrelated ideas about the emotion of envy. *First*, we have contrasted envy with benign envy by contending that (hostile) envy is a (single) kind of emotion, whereas emulative envy is the combination of two mental attitudes: desire and admiration. Envy is a single kind of emotion and not a combination of desire and hatred, because envy (in contradistinction to those two other states) displays self-reflexivity: envy always is about the self. Yet, envy is not only about the self, for it also is about the other - and this leads to our *second* claim: envy is a hetero-induced self-conscious emotion. To put another way, envy is a self-evaluative emotion, which inimically and aversively attends to the other. Sometimes, the phenomenological accent of the emotion is put on the other, making hostility the prominent accent of the emotion. Sometimes, this accent is on the self, making disempowerment and negative self-evaluation the stronger accent. Finally, an investigation into the good, which is the third intentional object of the emotion, led us to our *third* claim. Superficially, envy can be of a variety of goods, but on a deeper description, the main asset at stake in the emotion is esteem recognition by the subject's in-group. Accordingly, envy is a group-based emotion in the sense that, in contrast to a widely-held view, this emotion is

intrinsically social. In envy, the subject identifies with the rival at least in an indirect way, thereby relying on a sense of us.

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[i] A somewhat analogous position to the one propounded in this paper is defended by Hans Bernhard Schmid in his 2012. By 'sense of us' we roughly understand a form of "[…] communal awareness that is the general precondition of collective intentionality" (Searle, 2002, p. 104), we come back to this in Section 3.

[ii] The "good" is not necessarily an entity, which is ontologically independent or numerically distinct from the rival. As a referee remarked, I can envy you for possessing many different qualities or features I covet. However, even in this case, all of these goods would occupy a single place in the intentional structure of envy, insofar as they are occasions for the same comparative evaluation of myself against you.

[iii] Rawls (1999, p. 464) writes: "A rational individual is not subject to envy," but then he adds: "at least when the differences between himself and others are not thought to be the result of injustice and do not exceed certain limits".

[iv] What figures as 'equality principle' in this form of reasoning is not subject to the requirement of a formally correct or materially adequate definition of equality – common sense, not ethical theorizing, will regulate the understanding of that principle in envy. Approximately: if two persons have equal status, they must be treated equally, meaning that the distribution of goods must follow accordingly. Michael Tomasello and Frans de Waal have spearheaded empirical research showing that very young human children, as well as several species of primates and other animals, display inequity-averse behavior, which indicates that understanding and using an equality principle does not require very advanced conceptual thinking (for a review, see Brosnan, 2013; Tomasello & Warneken, 2008). We come back to the notion of equality at the end of this section. Note also that we are not presupposing that the subject must run the inferences based on this principle consciously.

[v] This may be one of the reasons why envy is considered a capital sin in the Abrahamic religions: the subject, in contesting God's distribution of goods, claims for herself the right to evaluate God's work. The subject, hence, mistrusts God and lacks gratitude (see Schimmel, 2008).

[vi] Sometimes, the awareness that, objectively, the rival deserves the good because of her merit, can cause the meta-emotion of shame often associated with envy. The criticism that the rival doesn't deserve the good, implied in envy, is then immediately revealed to the subject as unjustified (and yet not dismissible), giving rise to shame: the subject is ashamed of experiencing envy, and the feelings of hostility associated with it, because the subject knows that there is nothing one can blame the other person for, and still one feels hostility as if the

other was somehow blameworthy. (We are very thankful to Anna Bortolan for pushing us on this point.)

[vii] Before embarking in this investigation, let us add a final note on the comparison between benign and malign envy by emphasizing that, despite their differences, these two emotions still retain an important similarity. As we have seen, malicious envy is associated with the motivation to harm the position of the rival, whereas benign envy is associated with the motivation to improve oneself by moving upward. However, both emotions align insofar as, in them, the subject attempts to dissolve the (perceived) position of inferiority with respect to the rival. In this sense they can be considered a part of the same group of emotions.

[viii] Indeed (and at risk of oversimplifying), hatred is directed at its target in virtue of the disvalue(s) it exemplifies, not of the merits it possesses (Brudholm, 2010).

[ix] In a phenomenological understanding of the term, all experiences are self-conscious insofar as they are given for an experiencer (see Zahavi, 2005), and therefore in this sense all emotions would be self-conscious. But this is not what the term means here.

[x] Developmental psychology confirms the conjecture that envy is a self-conscious emotion: in fact, envy aligns with other self-conscious emotions insofar as it emerges from the age of 21 months – together with other self-conscious phenomena like self-recognition and self-objectification in the mirror (see Rochat, 2014, p. 220).

[xi] Many authors cash out the negative self-assessment implied in envy in terms of inferiority, but as Anna Bortolan rightly pointed out to us, this is potentially misleading. Compare envy with another emotion that does involve a feeling of inferiority: shame. In envy, the purported feeling of inferiority is confined to a specific point of rivalry with the other, but one feels equal to them in all other respects. The difference is perceived against a background of obvious similarities and experienced as undeserved. The sense of inferiority in envy is always localized and relative to the other, and so it might be better described as a feeling of (comparative)

disempowerment. In fact, a feeling of thorough inferiority seems to prevent envy (see Smith & Kim, 2007, p. 51). In shame, by contrast, the feeling of inferiority is more generalized and crippling: one feels oneself reduced to and entirely defined by a shameful characteristic (Montes Sánchez, 2014).

[xii] Note that some languages clearly differentiate between benign and malicious envy. For example, Japanese expresses benign envy with the term 羨ましい or うらやましい (*urayamashii*): this term is commonly used in everyday parlance, it does not convey hostility and can be self-attributed. In addition, the family of terms 妬み (*netami*), 妬ましい (*netamashii*) and 嫉妬 (*shitto*), that share the same radical (妬), expresses hostile envy: they are very seldom used in the first person sentence, neither singular nor plural, and basically are employed only when envy is attributed to somebody else. Protasi (2016) mentions that similar distinctions are present in Dutch, Thai, Polish, and Arabic.

[xiii] Protasi (2016), too, discusses envy's oscillation, but in different terms – for her the oscillation is between the good and the rival. We do not consider the good to be an element that is able to induce oscillation in the emotion, given that we have established in section 1 that the good is deemed to be not acquirable by the envier.

[xiv] Of course, all kinds of emotions can be induced by others, in the broad sense of 'caused' by them. For example, if I am waiting in line to buy tickets at the cinema and you jump the queue, I will get angry at you, and my anger can be described as caused by you. But this is a *paradigmatic* case of anger, an emotion caused by another and directed at another. Anger at oneself is the *special* case. For self-conscious emotions, the opposite is the case, they are *paradigmatically* about oneself and brought about by facts about the emoter's situation: her actions, her traits, or things that befall her. The technical term 'hetero-induced', which in this sense is only applicable to self-conscious emotions, is meant to designate those *special* cases where one performs a self-assessment based on another person's actions, traits or situation, like

you feeling proud of your daughter's achievement. In the literature, these instances are often referred to as 'vicarious' emotions, but we prefer not to use this term for reasons given in Salice & Montes Sánchez 2016.

[xv] Here, again, we are thankful to Anna Bortolan, who has brought our attention to the differences among these evaluations.

[xvi] It is a current matter of debate when children develop the ability to group identify: it is relatively uncontroversial that, by the age of 3, pre-school children accomplish a shift towards a "socio-centric mode of reasoning" (see Dunham & Emory, 2014). But studies into in-group favoritism (which is generally considered as a by-effect of group identification) show that children from the age of 14 months understand and, in certain cases, orient their action on the difference between out-group and in-group (see Kinzler, Corriveau, & Harris, 2011; Buttelmann, Zmyj, Daum, & Carpenter, 2013). Relatedly, children of 21-27 months of age engage in joint action (Warneken, Gräfenhain, & Tomasello, 2012), which is an ability that has been explained by appealing to their capacity of group identifying (Pacherie, 2013).

[xvii] Although we use the term 'value' in this paper, nothing in our argument relies on the metaphysical status of values. The reader, who refuses an axiologically robust notion of value, can reformulate the corresponding thoughts by employing locutions such as 'evaluation.'

[xviii] We thank Antonio Gómez Ramos for pushing us to clarify our discussion of recognition and bringing Neuhouser to our attention.

[xix] Note that this is not to deny that envy, just like all emotions, is infused by a fundamental concern about the emoter's personal well-being. To put our claim another way, the dimension of the well-being at stake in envy is intrinsically tied to the esteem of the others and, in particular, of the emoter's (perceived) in-group members.