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I Can Be Happy for You, but Not All the Time: A Contingency Model of Envy and Positive Empathy in the Workplace

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Although individuals are capable of feeling happiness for others' positive experiences, management scholars have thus far considered envy to be the sole emotional reaction of employees in response to coworkers' positive outcomes. In this article, we introduce the concept of positive empathy—the experience of happiness in response to a coworker's positive experience and the real or imagined happiness in the coworker—as an alternative response to envy and distinguish it from related concepts in the organizational literature. We develop a theoretical framework to explain the psychological processes that underlie envy and positive empathy, and identify individual and contextual contingencies that might incline employees to experience these emotions. Lastly, we discuss individual and organizational outcomes of envy and positive empathy and explain implications for management research and practice.

Keywords: positive empathy, envy, social emotions, affective events theory, positive psychology

Organizations are places where individuals both accomplish their own career goals and are able to witness the successes and accomplishments of others. Many organizations have implemented formal or informal systems for showcasing and celebrating high-performing employees. At Starbucks, for example, the Warm Regards program offers three levels of recognition, ranging from “The Mug,” for outstanding service, to “Bravo,” for productive partnerships, and “The Spirit of Starbucks,” for passion toward work. Similar corporate recognition programs include “Employee of the Month” at McDonald's and IBM's “Bravo Award” (Kosfeld & Neckermann, 2011). The aim of such human resource (HR) practices is to reward high performing employees, recognize and celebrate their achievements, and motivate others. The actual extent to which these practices serve their intended purposes depends largely, however, on the manner in which employees respond to their coworkers' positive experiences.

While current HR practices assume that celebrating and showcasing high-performing employees does indeed elicit positive responses from other employees, no organizational research to date has looked at such *positive* responses to coworkers' positive experiences. To the contrary, envy—defined as “pain at another person's good fortune” (Tai, Narayanan, & McAllister, 2012, p. 107)—has thus far been considered to be the primary response of employees under such circumstances. This exclusive focus on envy is based on the assumption that employees are in constant competition for scarce organizational resources (e.g., Dineen, Duffy, Henle, & Lee, 2017). While this underlying assumption regarding competition has informed some compelling research, it can be seen as narrow and limiting.

For we know that envy is not the only possible response to others' positive experiences; an individual can also experience happiness about a positive outcome or state in another person's life (Haidt, 2003; Morelli, Lieberman, & Zaki, 2015; Royzman & Rozin, 2006). Indeed, in most organizations, employees regularly collaborate and are encouraged by and champion one other's successes. Yet, employees' emotions of happiness in response to coworkers' positive experiences—referred to here as *positive empathy*—has thus far remained largely unexamined, and little is known about its nature, presence, or role in the workplace.

The current focus on envy as the primary response to coworkers' successes is representative of a tendency in the broader field of psychology to focus on negativity, weakness, and pathology (Seligman, 2002). The relatively recent positive psychology movement (Luthans & Church, 2002; Nelson & Cooper, 2007), however, has made it clear that ordinary human behavior cannot be understood fully within purely negative parameters of human experiences. If we are to fully understand employees' reactions to coworkers' positive experiences, it is essential to challenge our current assumptions and recognize that employees can also expe-

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rience happiness in response to coworkers' positive experiences. An integrative theoretical framework that accommodates both kinds of affective reactions, positive empathy as well as envy, would be useful in this respect. Such a conceptual model could address a current gap in the literature and, more importantly, help organizational scholars engage in a more balanced inquiry of employees' reactions to others' positive experiences at work.

In addition to theoretical reasons, there are practical reasons for considering employees' reactions to coworkers' positive experiences. For example, feelings of envy have been found to motivate withdrawal from work, deviant behaviors, and the victimization of high performers (Dineen et al., 2017; Duffy, Scott, Shaw, Tepper, & Aquino, 2012; Duffy & Shaw, 2000; Kim & Glomb, 2014; Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004). On the other hand, while the effects of positive empathy have yet to be studied in organizational contexts, recent research in social psychology connects it with personal well-being, strong interpersonal relationships, and prosocial behavior (Morelli, Lieberman, et al., 2015). Given these important implications, scholars have noted the necessity for organizations to manage employees' reactions to others' positive experiences (e.g., Dogan & Vecchio, 2001). An understanding of antecedent conditions of envy and positive empathy could help managers to foster conditions that favor the latter.

In this article, we develop a model that explains employees' emotional reactions to coworkers' positive experiences. We begin by reviewing the literature on envy with particular attention to its antecedents and the underlying psychological process of social comparison (Festinger, 1954). Next, we introduce positive empathy as an alternative to envy, its relevant antecedents, and the corresponding underlying psychological process of perspective taking. Having identified triggers of envy and positive empathy in the workplace, we then assess individual and organizational consequences of envy and positive empathy. Specifically, we explore how these affective experiences influence intra- and interpersonal outcomes in the workplace. We develop specific propositions connecting envy and positive empathy to employee well-being, performance, relationship quality, social undermining, helping behavior, and team effectiveness in workplace settings. We conclude with a discussion of the theoretical and practical contributions of the present study and suggestions for future research.

Envy

What is Envy?

Traditionally, envy has been defined as "an unpleasant and often painful blend of feelings characterized by inferiority, hostility, and resentment caused by comparison with a person or group of persons who possess something we desire" (Smith & Kim, 2007, p. 49). In these terms, envy is an affective experience consisting of two principal components, one relating to feelings of inadequacy and the other to feelings of ill will (Salovey, 1991). In fact, nearly every empirical study that has taken this traditional view has referred to negative outcomes for both those who envy and those who are envied (see Smith & Kim, 2007). As Elster (1999) observed, "The action tendency of envy is to destroy the envied object or its possessor" (p. 39).

More recent research, however, has demonstrated that individuals also experience a more benign form of envy that is free of ill

will (Crusius & Lange, 2014; Lange & Crusius, 2015; van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2009). Unlike malicious envy, benign envy is associated with a willingness to learn from the object of envy and a motivation to improve (Cohen-Charash, 2009; van de Ven et al., 2009). Acknowledging that envy can lead to both positive and negative outcomes, Tai et al. (2012) argued that the definition of envy should be decoupled from its outcomes and accordingly offered the definition quoted above (again, "pain at another person's good fortune," p. 107). In an effort to develop an integrative theory of envy, Lange, Weidman, and Crusius (2018) empirically juxtaposed the three prominent ways in which envy has been conceptualized in the literature—as uniformly negative, as possessing both positive and negative attributes, and as driven solely by pain. They conducted a series of five studies to conclude that envy consists of three aspects, one of which, pain, was held to be a quick and fading reaction that predicts the other two, benign envy and malicious envy, which were considered enduring attitudinal constructs.

Envy has also been conceptualized as taking the form of either an episodic state or a dispositional trait. The former sort is the focus of the present article; it is the envy experienced by an individual in response to a specific event involving a specific referent other (Cohen-Charash, 2009). Dispositional envy, by contrast, refers to a chronic sense of inferiority and chronic feelings of ill will toward those who are better off (Cohen-Charash, 2009; Smith, Parrott, Diener, Hoyle, & Kim, 1999). While dispositional envy can certainly contribute to episodic envy, empirical research has distinguished the two constructs (Cohen-Charash, 2009). Because the aim of this study was to document employees' specific responses to one another's positive experiences, the focus is specifically on employees' episodic envy in the workplace. In the next section we review the psychological process that underlies envy and its antecedents.

Social Comparison and Antecedents of Envy

By definition, envy is a product of unfavorable, or upward, social comparison (Salovey & Rodin, 1984). To understand its antecedents, therefore, it is necessary to consider individuals' social comparison processes. According to social comparison theory, individuals have an innate need for self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954). In the absence of objective information, they compare themselves to similar others with regard to social standing, capabilities, and the accuracy of their opinions. A favorable, or downward, comparison to another enhances self-esteem, while an unfavorable, or upward, comparison produces negative self-evaluations and resulting feelings of envy.

Based on social comparison theory, researchers have identified two common antecedents of envy, perceived similarity to the target and self-relevance of the comparison domain (Smith & Kim, 2007). Numerous empirical studies have shown that the likelihood that one individual will envy another correlates with perceived similarity between them on some level (e.g., Parrott, 1991; Salovey & Rodin, 1984; Salovey & Rothman, 1991; Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004). Such findings are clearly consistent with the tenet of social comparison theory that similarities provide a basis for, and indeed make meaningful, social comparison. An accomplishment by a senior executive, for example, is far less likely to affect an intern's self-evaluation than that of a fellow intern.

Perceived similarity further contributes to envy in terms of fairness. According to balance theory (Heider, 1958), individuals believe that similar individuals “ought” to receive similar or equivalent advantages; this norm is violated when one person receives an advantage that similar others do not. Envy, from this perspective, often embeds a sense of injustice in the form of either an unfair advantage received by another or a disadvantage experienced by the self, a notion that has been confirmed by an empirical study of individuals’ autobiographical accounts of envy (Smith, Parrott, Ozer, & Moniz, 1994). Such feelings of injustice are less likely to arise in response to similar situations involving dissimilar others, who are not expected to receive equal outcomes in the first place.

Moving on to the second determinant of envy according to social comparison theory, self-relevance of the comparison domain refers to the notion that, in addition to sharing similarities with an advantaged person, the individual who experiences envy must consider the domain in which the advantage is enjoyed to be relevant (e.g., Salovey & Rodin, 1984, 1991; Tesser, 1988). From the perspective of Tesser’s (1988) self-evaluation maintenance model, for example, individuals define themselves with regard to their success in various life domains—one employee might consider himself to be a good salesperson, whereas another might consider herself a good manager. Maintenance of these self-definitions is important because they help individuals to preserve the continuity of their self-concepts, and social comparison is fundamental to their emergence and maintenance. Approached this way, then, when a similar other enjoys greater success than a given individual in a domain that is relevant to that individual, negative self-evaluation is likely to produce envy. If, to the contrary, the domain is not relevant, social comparison does not occur and no envy is experienced.

Overall, research on envy is fairly consistent on the idea that envy results from an unfavorable social comparison with others who are similar to them, but have achieved a desirable outcome in a domain that is relevant to them (Lange et al., 2018; Smith & Kim, 2007). Turning now to positive empathy, we again begin by offering a definition, next examine the psychological process underlying it, and conclude by identifying its antecedents.

Positive Empathy

Empathy has been defined as an “affective response that stems from the apprehension of another’s emotional state or condition and that is identical or very similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel” (Eisenberg, Wentzel, & Harris, 1998, p. 507). It can include both positive and negative affective experiences, though, thus far, scholarly focus has remained almost exclusively on the latter in the form of empathic sorrow. Taking a somewhat different approach, Smith, Keating, and Stotland (1989) examined how individuals derive happiness from the *resolution* of others’ distress, a phenomenon that they termed empathic joy—but the starting point for which was still another’s sorrow, as opposed to happiness.

Morelli, Lieberman, et al. (2015) defined positive empathy without starting from sorrow as “understanding and vicariously sharing others’ positive emotions,” which involves “imagining, recalling, observing, or learning of others’ positive outcomes” (p. 58). Sallquist, Eisenberg, Spinrad, Eggum, and Gaertner (2009)

similarly defined positive empathy as “an expression of happiness or joy that results from comprehending another person’s positive emotional state or condition” (p. 223). Being specifically interested in employees’ reactions to coworkers’ positive experiences, we define positive empathy as an employee’s experience of happiness in response to a coworker’s positive experience (state or outcome) and the real or imagined happiness in the coworker.

The concept of positive empathy can be found outside of academic discourse. Buddhist scriptures (specifically the Kalama Sutta in the Anguttara Nikaya) use the term *mudita* to refer to the experience of happiness for another’s prosperity and highlight this experience as one of four sublime mental states¹ that individuals are encouraged to develop. The modern Hebrew word *firgun* likewise refers to the acceptance of another person’s success with happiness rather than bitterness or envy (Cohen-Charash, Erez, & Bavli, 2002). Although the English language does not have an equivalent word for *mudita* or *firgun*, the human capacity to experience happiness for someone else’s positive experiences has been identified as an important individual capacity by organizational practitioners. Klein (1975), for example, observed that “the ability to admire another’s achievements is one of the factors that make successful team work possible” (p. 260).

An employee can experience positive empathy with or without direct interaction with another individual. If an employee can see, hear, or interact with a coworker, positive empathy can be triggered by the other individual’s emotional cues. Such direct, face-to-face interaction with another is not always necessary for an individual to experience positive empathy, however. For example, an employee might learn about a coworker’s positive outcome before the latter does and experience positive empathy by imagining his or her reaction upon hearing the news.

Like envy, positive empathy has been conceptualized as both a transient state and dispositional trait. Research has shown that individuals vary in their dispositional capacities for perspective taking and empathy (Davis, 1983). Given that positive empathy is one facet of overall empathic concern, positive empathy can also be conceptualized as an individual trait. The positive empathy scale (PES) was developed by Morelli, Lieberman, Telzer, and Zaki (Morelli, Lieberman, et al., 2015), specifically to measure trait positive empathy in adults. This measure has demonstrated strong internal reliability and temporal stability, as well as consistency between self-and other-reports across several studies. Moreover, trait positive empathy has been found to correlate positively with perspective taking, general positive affect, negative empathy, and the personality variables of agreeableness and extraversion (Morelli, Lieberman, et al., 2015).

What Positive Empathy Is Not

In a recent review of the literature on positive empathy, Morelli, Lieberman, et al. (2015) differentiated positive empathy from the related constructs in psychology of negative empathy, positive affect, warm glow, and perceived positive empathy. There is no need to replicate their efforts here, but it will be useful at this point to differentiate positive empathy from similar other concepts found in the organizational literature—specifically, the basic emotion of

¹ The other three affective states are compassion, kindness, and equanimity.

joy (Lazarus, 1991), emotional contagion (Barsade, 2002), pride (Oveis, Horberg, & Keltner, 2010), benign envy (Tai et al., 2012), and compassion (Dutton, Workman, & Hardin, 2014).

According to Fredrickson (1998), “feelings of joy arise in contexts appraised as safe and familiar and as requiring low effort and, in some cases, by events construed as accomplishments or progress towards one’s goals” (p. 304). Joy and positive empathy have been distinguished empirically, though the two concepts have correlated positively in studies of both children and adults (Light et al., 2009; Sallquist et al., 2009). Thus, to begin with, joy involves a single individual, while positive empathy is a social emotion that “necessarily depend[s] on other people’s thoughts, feelings or actions, as experienced, recalled, anticipated or imagined at first hand, or instantiated in more generalized consideration of social norms or conventions” (Hareli & Parkinson, 2008, p. 131). In differentiating social emotions from basic emotions, Blader, Wiesenfeld, Fortin, and Wheeler-Smith (2013) noted that, “while basic emotions represent one’s own psychological state, an essential and distinguishing feature of social emotions is that they are associated with mentally representing the internal psychological states of others (sometimes referred to as ‘mentalizing’ others)” (p.63). In this sense, positive empathy is inherently interpersonal and social, unlike the basic emotion of joy.

Another differentiating factor between joy and positive empathy relates to the focus of the individual who is experiencing the emotion. Joy is a self-focused affective experience, as it only involves an individual’s own affective state (Blader, Wiesenfeld, Rothman, & Wheeler-Smith, 2010; Morelli, Lieberman, et al., 2015). In contrast, positive empathy is an other-focused emotion, because it emanates from one individual taking the perspective of another. There can, however, be instances when a person feels joyful in response to another’s positive experience for reasons that are in fact self-focused. For example, another’s positive experience may reflect well on an individual, as when a mentee’s achievement brings credit to a mentor. By way of further example, an individual may stand to gain materially from another’s positive experience, as when a job offer extended to one employee represents a potential advancement opportunity for another. Morelli, Lieberman, et al. (2015) differentiated such instances from positive empathy, classifying them as examples of joy. We take a similar approach in this article.

Positive empathy must also be differentiated from emotional contagion, which is the tendency to “automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and, consequently, to converge emotionally” (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994, p. 5). Emotional contagion has been described as “relatively automatic, unintentional, uncontrollable, and largely inaccessible to conversant awareness” (Hatfield, Bensman, Thornton, & Rapson, 2014, p. 161). Positive empathy, by contrast, is a conscious process that results from perspective taking and involves the higher-order cognitive processes of inference and deliberation (Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, & Gilovich, 2004). Unlike emotional contagion, then, positive empathy is more of a volitional experience and one that involves a distinction between self and others (Decety & Lamm, 2006).

A few studies have suggested that emotional contagion can also be produced by a more deliberate set of processes as individuals consciously adjust their emotions to fit the prevailing mood of others in their environment (Adelmann & Zajonc, 1989; Sullins, 1991). Under these circumstances, individuals use “emotion as a

type of social information to understand how he/she *should* be feeling” (Barsade, 2002, p. 648, emphasis added). Positive empathy, by contrast, does not involve this normative, indeed conformative, pressure. Lastly, both conscious and subconscious processes of contagion occur as an individual observes or directly interacts with another individual, which is not a necessary condition for positive empathy (Morelli, Lieberman, et al., 2015).

The distinction between positive empathy and pride must also be considered, the latter being an emotion that can emerge in response to another person’s positive experience. Pride is elicited “when individuals direct attentional focus to the self, activating self-representations, and appraise an emotion-eliciting event as relevant to those representations” (Tracy & Robins, 2007, p. 507). As such, pride is widely considered a self-conscious emotion that is produced when individuals credit themselves or internally attribute positive outcomes (Lewis, 2000). While an individual may derive self-worth from the accomplishments of another (e.g., accomplishments of one’s workgroup; Tyler & Blader, 2001), the main focus of pride remains on the self (e.g., I am proud of the accomplishment of *my* workgroup). Positive empathy, by contrast, is directed toward another who receives credit for an accomplishment rather than the self. Further, pride, unlike positive empathy, is associated with social dominance and feelings of superiority over others (Taylor, Lam, Chasteen, & Pratt, 2015; Tracy & Robins, 2004; Williams & DeSteno, 2009). In summary, pride motivates individuals to distinguish themselves from others (Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010; Oveis et al., 2010), while positive empathy is not associated with any such motivation.

Positive empathy is also different from benign envy. Benign envy, is free from hostile feelings toward the envied other, but, unlike positive empathy, it is a painful emotional experience that results from negative social comparisons (Tai et al., 2012; van de Ven et al., 2009). Further, an individual experiencing benign envy redresses the associated pain by attempting to rise to the standard of the object of envy—rather than following the negative path of malicious envy (Crusius & Lange, 2014; Lange & Crusius, 2015; van de Ven et al., 2009). Positive empathy differs from this kind of envy in that it is a positive emotional state that does not involve feelings of inferiority or pain.

Finally, positive empathy is distinct from compassion, which is “the feeling that arises in witnessing another’s suffering and that motivates a subsequent desire to help” (Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010, p. 351). Although both compassion and positive empathy are other-oriented emotions, they differ in two significant respects. First, the stimulus for compassion is the suffering or negative experience of another individual, whereas the stimulus for positive empathy is the positive experience of another individual. Second, compassion by definition includes a motivation to act, to help a person in need, while positive empathy does not.

Now that we have conceptualized positive empathy and distinguished it from related constructs, we next examine the psychological process that underlies positive empathy to identify its antecedents.

Perspective Taking and Antecedents of Positive Empathy

Psychologists have put forward various definitions of empathy, but most agree in viewing it as an affective response that results

from perspective taking (Batson, 1991; Decety, 2005; Lamm, Batson, & Decety, 2007). Thus, Eisenberg and Miller (1987) defined empathy as “an affective state that stems from the *apprehension of another’s emotional state or condition* that is congruent with it” (p. 91, emphasis added). Perspective taking, in turn, has been defined as a cognitive process whereby “an individual tries to understand another’s internal states and thoughts by cognitively placing himself or herself in the other person’s situation” (Eisenberg et al., 1998, p. 508).

In one of the early studies linking perspective taking to empathy, Stotland (1969) found that individuals who were instructed to imagine the feelings of someone in distress reacted with significantly more empathy than those who merely watched someone in distress. In a subsequent study, Coke, Batson, and McDavis (1978) showed that assuming the perspective of someone in need increased empathy, which in turn motivated helping behavior. Somewhat more recently, Batson, Early, and Salvarani (1997) distinguished two forms of perspective taking, imagining another’s feelings and imagining one’s own feelings in an analogous situation, both of which were capable of evoking empathy. Although most studies linking perspective-taking to empathy have been based on negative empathy, more recent neuropsychological research has shown that perspective-taking underlies both positive empathy and negative empathy because they activate the same regions associated with perspective-taking in the brain (Mitchell, 2009; Morelli, Rameson, & Lieberman, 2014).

Given the central role that perspective-taking plays in the experience of empathy, it is not surprising that factors that contribute to or enhance individuals’ perspective taking ability have been identified as antecedents of positive empathy. In a study by Varnum, Shi, Chen, Qiu, and Han (2014), for example, individuals who were primed with an interdependent self-construal (i.e., viewing the self in terms of relationships with others) experienced more positive empathy than those who were primed with an independent self-construal (i.e., viewing the self as autonomous). Unsurprisingly, individuals characterized by interdependent self-construals have been found to be more adept at perspective taking than those characterized by independent self-construals (Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005).

In addition to self-construal, group membership is another aspect that contributes to perspective taking; that is, individuals are better able to assume the perspective of in-group members and those who are similar to them than that of out-group members and those who appear dissimilar (Adams et al., 2010). Thus, it has been found that individuals experience more positive empathy when in-group members receive positive outcomes than when out-group members do (Cikara, Bruneau, Van Bavel, & Saxe, 2014; Molenberghs et al., 2014).

A third aspect that contributes to perspective taking and, thereby, positive empathy is prior emotional attachment (i.e., participation in a relationship that is considered positive and important by the individual). Based on the notion that a prior emotional attachment facilitates perspective taking, Royzman and Rozin (2006) conducted a series of studies to examine individuals’ propensity to experience negative empathy and positive empathy as a function of them having a prior emotional attachment with the target of empathy. Results of their studies revealed that having a prior emotional attachment contributes to individuals’ experience

of positive empathy significantly more so than it contributes to their experience of negative empathy.

Thus far, we have examined the psychological processes that underlie envy and positive empathy and identified their antecedents. In the following section, we review the literature in an effort to explain the circumstances under which employees might react to coworkers’ positive experiences with these emotions.

When and Why Employees Experience Envy or Positive Empathy in the Workplace

We theorize that individuals would be less likely to experience positive empathy when they are predisposed to experience envy. The fifth-century BCE philosopher Socrates referred to envy as the “ulcer of the soul.” Even in its benign form, envy is a painful experience characterized by feelings of inferiority that has a depressive effect (Parrott & Smith, 1993; Smith et al., 1994). In its more extreme form, malicious envy contains feelings of hostility toward the envied party, in addition to feelings of inferiority (Smith & Kim, 2007; Smith et al., 1994). These hostile and depressive aspects of envy can deter the emergence of positive affect in people. Thus, for example, it has been reported that envy-prone individuals have relatively low levels of happiness, vitality, and life satisfaction (Milfont & Gouveia, 2009).

In light of these considerations, we argue that, while envy and positive empathy are distinct constructs that emanate from different psychological processes, the experience of envy, or a predisposition to experience it, can impede the emergence of positive empathy. A lack of envy does not, however, necessarily mean that an individual would experience positive empathy. Rather, we suggest, envy, whether episodic or as a trait, is negatively associated with episodic positive empathy. From this perspective, a low level of envy is a necessary but insufficient precondition for an individual to experience positive empathy. We accordingly formulated the following proposition.

Proposition 1: Envy (both episodic and as a trait) in the workplace is negatively associated with the extent to which an individual experiences episodic positive empathy.

Drawing on theoretical and empirical research on envy and positive empathy, we develop in the following sections a conceptual model that explains when and why employees react with positive empathy or envy in the workplace. This model is informed by affective events theory (AET), which, as the name suggests, emphasizes events that evoke affective reactions (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). According to AET, individuals assess events to ascertain the extent to which they are self-relevant and beneficial or detrimental to them. These appraisals are influenced by the dispositional characteristics of the appraiser and the broader contextual cues of the environment. AET predicts that individuals’ appraisals of events will result in positive or negative discrete emotions (such as happiness and anger) that will, in turn, lead to behavioral consequences (referred to as affect driven behaviors in AET).

As mentioned, social emotions by definition involve more than one individual (Hareli & Parkinson, 2008). In cases of envy and positive empathy, events that evoke social emotions involve another’s positive experience. Following AET, we argue that one employee is likely to appraise an event relating to another’s

positive experience cognitively through either social comparison or perspective taking, depending on dispositional and situational factors. The social comparison pathway would lead to envy, while the perspective taking pathway would lead to positive empathy. In our model, factors that affect appraisals of others' positive experiences—in ways that result in envy or positive empathy—include dispositional aspects of the perceiver, characteristics of the target, characteristics of the positive outcome, the nature of the relationship between the perceiver and the target, and characteristics of the organizational context (see Figure 1). Empirically, these factors can also be considered moderators of the relationships between an affective event (i.e., another's positive outcome) and the emotion that the event evokes (i.e., either envy or positive empathy), and they are presented as such in the propositions below.

Triggers of Social Comparison

Dispositional envy. The extant research indicates that individuals' affective dispositions influence their emotional reactions to specific events (e.g., Cropanzano, James, & Konovsky, 1993; Staw, Bell, & Clausen, 1986). Thus, for example, individuals characterized by high levels of trait hostility have been found to display particularly strong reactions to anger-provoking events (Judge, Scott, & Ilies, 2006). We similarly expected that employees with high levels of dispositional envy would experience more frequent and more intense episodic envy in reaction to others' positive experiences.

Individuals characterized by high levels of dispositional envy have been found to display both chronic feelings of inferiority and

of ill will toward those who are more advantaged (Smith et al., 1999). These qualities also influence their discrete reactions to others' positive experiences, which accentuate preexisting feelings of inferiority. Such individuals are predisposed both to engage in negative social comparisons and to harbor strong feelings of inferiority and ill will as a result. Indeed, it has been found that individuals who have a chronic sense of inferiority experience more intense negative affect after upward social comparisons (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, VanYperen, & Dakof, 1990), and are more likely to experience envy toward others (Appel, Crusius, & Gerlach, 2015; Salovey & Rodin, 1991; Wood, Giordano-Beech, Taylor, Michela, & Gaus, 1994). In light of these findings, we formulated the following proposition.

Proposition 2: An employee's dispositional envy will moderate the relationship between a coworker's positive experience and the employee's episodic envy. An employee with high levels of dispositional envy will experience more frequent and stronger feelings of episodic envy in reaction to a coworker's positive experience.

Target comparability. As mentioned before, one of the two main antecedents of envy is similarity or comparability, a notion that has been conceptualized in at least two distinct ways in the organizational literature on social comparison and envy. On the one hand, similarity has been conceptualized in terms of work experience, work attitudes, personality, and opinions (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004); from this perspective, it is a subjective construct rooted in the perceiver's evaluations of a social target. Perceived

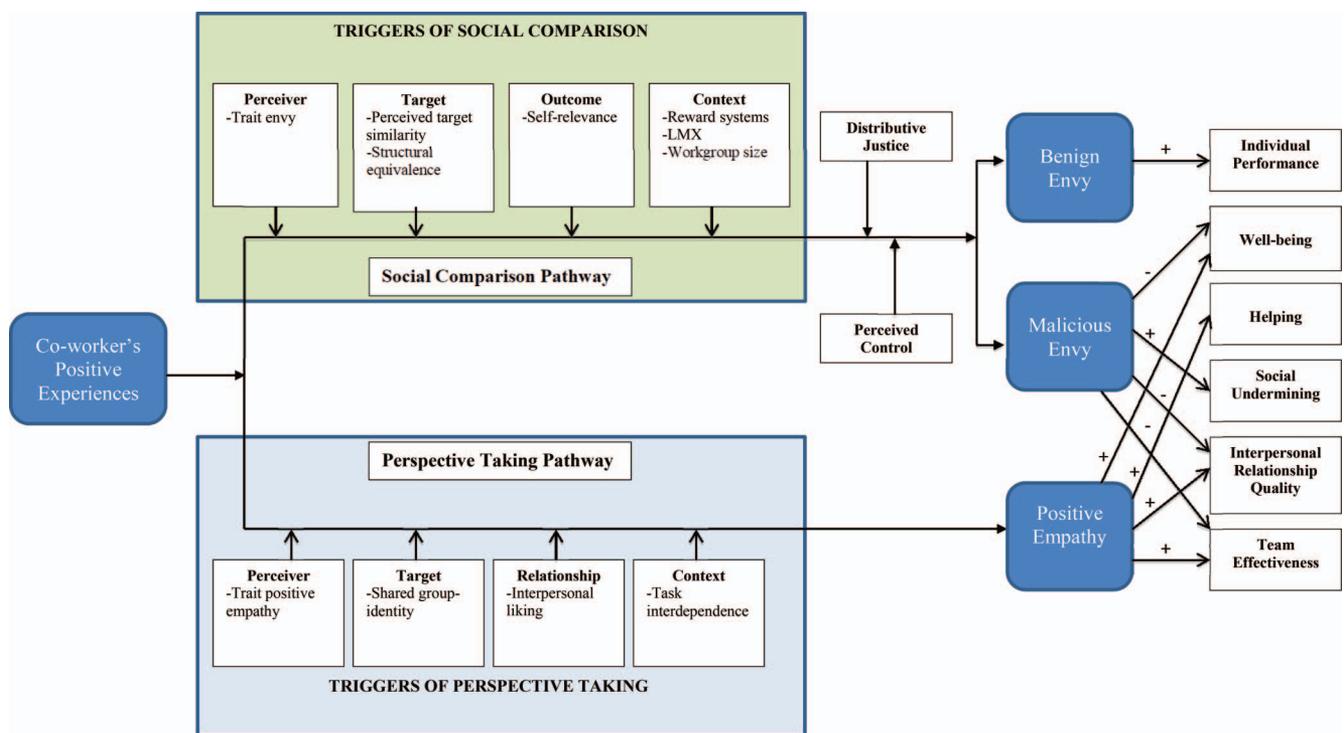


Figure 1. A contingency model of affective responses to coworkers' positive experiences. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

similarity to a target has been found to accentuate the experience of envy. Thus, for example, in a field study of female bank employees who had been passed over for a promotion, Schaubroeck and Lam (2004) found perceptions of similarity to the successful promotion candidate to be predictive of the amount of envy harbored by the unsuccessful candidates.

A more objective conceptualization of similarity, on the other hand, is Burt's (1987) notion of structural equivalency, which describes the equivalence between the positions held by two employees. Two individuals are considered structurally equivalent if they "occupy the same position in the social structure and . . . are proximate to the extent that they have the same pattern of relations with occupants of other positions" (Burt, 1987, p. 1291). Structurally equivalent individuals typically hold positions at the same level in an organizational hierarchy and are often substitutable and in competition (Sailer, 1978). More important, for the present discussion, structurally equivalent employees use each other as a basis for social comparison (Smith et al., 1999). In the words of Burt (1982), "structural equivalence predicts that two people identically positioned in the flow of influential communication will use each other as a frame of reference for subjective judgments" (p. 1293). Employees with a propensity to use structurally equivalent others for social comparisons are, therefore, more likely to envy them. We accordingly proposed that similarity—whether perceived or in the form of structural equivalency—can trigger social comparison processes in employees that lead to episodic envy, as follows.

Proposition 3a: An employee's perceptions about the similarity between the self and a coworker will moderate the relationship between the coworker's positive experience and the employee's episodic envy. A coworker's positive experiences will lead to stronger episodic envy at higher levels of perceived self-other similarity.

Proposition 3b: Structural equivalence will moderate the relationship between a coworker's positive experiences and an employee's episodic envy. A coworker's positive experiences will lead to stronger episodic envy at higher levels of structural equivalence.

Self-relevance of the comparison domain. The second antecedent of envy, also as described earlier, is the self-relevance of a coworker's positive experience. We posited that one employee's success in a performance domain that is relevant to another's self-definition is likely to trigger upward social comparisons in the latter that lead to feelings of envy. In a study by Salovey and Rodin (1984), participants were asked to complete a career aptitude test, after which they were told that their prospects in a preferred field or career were either outstanding or poor. They were then told about another individual in either the same or a different domain whose test results were either better or worse. The responses indicated that the participants only felt envious of individuals whom they considered to be involved in career domains relevant to themselves. Similar results were reported by Takahashi and colleagues (2009), who found that the highest levels of envy were experienced by participants who were told about individuals superior to them in a domain that was self-relevant. Based on these findings, we formulated the following proposition.

Proposition 4: Self-relevance of comparison domain will moderate the relationship between a coworker's positive experience and an employee's episodic envy. A coworker's positive experience will lead to stronger episodic envy when the self-relevance of the comparison domain is high as compared with low.

Contextual factors. Contextual factors of an organization can also influence the social comparison processes of individuals in ways that foster episodic envy. As Sterling and Labianca (2015) noted, "when employees make sense of social comparison information and envy-evoking situations, they do so within an organizational context—the organizational systems and structures that shape employee experience and influence employee perceptions" (p. 301). We identified three organizational contextual factors that trigger social comparison and thereby envy, namely organizational reward systems, leadership-member exchange quality, and group size.

Organizational reward systems have been considered one of the key contextual factors that trigger social comparison and envy in the workplace (Vecchio, 2005). An organization's reward system consists of a "related set of processes through which behaviors are directed and motivated to achieve individual and collaborative performances; the set of processes comprise goal setting, assessing performance, distributing rewards, and communicating feedback" (Jansen & Von Glinow, 1985, p. 816). Because individuals have an innate tendency to adapt their behaviors to engage in activities that are rewarded, reward systems have important implications for employees' interpersonal behavior in the workplace (Bartol & Srivastava, 2002; Becker & Huselid, 1992; Kerr, 1975). Zero-sum reward allocation practices, for example, have been found to induce a mentality of scarcity in employees that creates a need to compete with others to secure resources (Poon, 2003; Vecchio, 2000). Such tournament models of reward practices inevitably produce winners and losers (Main, O'Reilly, & Wade, 1993). Further, individual-oriented rewards encourage employees to place greater value on personal performance than on group performance (Cropanzano, Kacmar, & Bozeman, 1995). Because individuals engage in heightened levels of social comparison when they are in competitive environments (Ruble & Frey, 1991), an internal competition that is driven by zero-sum and exclusively individual-oriented reward systems can increase the level of workplace envy. We accordingly formulated the following proposition.

Proposition 5: Zero-sum reward practices and exclusively individual-focused reward practices will moderate the relationship between a coworker's positive experience and an employee's episodic envy. A coworker's positive experience will lead to stronger episodic envy in the presence of zero-sum reward practices and exclusively individual-focused reward practices.

A second contextual factor that triggers social comparison in employees is their relationship with an organizational leadership. An organization's leaders, its managers and supervisors, rarely have the same kind of relationship with every employee. Thus, leader-member exchange (LMX) theory posits that leaders form various types of relationships with their subordinates, giving some more attention and resources than others (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen, 1976; Liden & Graen, 1980). Empirical re-

search involving LMX has indeed shown that leaders treat subordinates differently and in doing so create in-group and out-group divisions within work teams (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). Drawing on the LMX literature, Wu, Tsui, and Kinicki (2010) coined the term “differentiated leadership” to refer to “the case when the leader exhibits varying levels of individual-focused leadership behavior across different group members, for instance paying more attention or providing more support to some members than to others)” (p. 90). Although some level of differentiated leadership is unavoidable, we posit that high levels of differentiated leadership in workgroups trigger social comparison and thereby episodic envy in employees.

When a leader treats his or her followers with a high degree of variability, they, especially those who are poorly treated, inevitably compare and contrast their relationships with the relationships the supervisor has with others. We accordingly posited that followers who have low-quality relationships with their supervisors tend to be in comparatively inferior positions within their workgroups and more likely to engage in negative social comparison and to experience envy in response to a coworker’s success. One of the few studies to examine antecedents of workplace envy, by Vecchio (2005), found just this, that employees who reported low-quality relationships with their supervisors exhibited greater envy of their coworkers than those with higher-quality relationships. We accordingly formulated the following proposition.

Proposition 6: An employee’s leader-member exchange quality will moderate the relationship between a coworker’s positive experience and the employee’s episodic envy. A coworker’s positive experience will lead to stronger episodic envy when the quality of the employee’s leader-member exchange is low.

Another contextual factor that can trigger social comparison processes in employees is workgroup size. Sterling and Labianca (2015) suggested that the size of individuals’ comparison networks determines the amount of attention that they pay to other individuals in the network. In a small network, employees become focused on one or two others whose outcomes have a substantial impact on their self-evaluations. The intense focus on a few others in a small network results in competitive rivalries that compel employees to process each other’s successes as personal losses (Kilduff, Elfenbein, & Staw, 2010; Kilduff, Galinsky, Gallo, & Reade, 2016). In a large network, by contrast, because employees have multiple others to whom they can direct their attention, the accomplishment of any one coworker is less likely to have a large impact on their self-evaluations, and any negative feelings that do arise in this respect are ameliorated by the likely availability of others with whom they can be compared favorably (Sterling & Labianca, 2015).

In light of these observations, we proposed that individuals in smaller workgroups are more affected by the positive experiences of their coworkers than those in larger workgroups. Further, in light of extant research specifically on envy and group size (e.g., Sterling, Shah, & Labianca, 2016), we considered employees in smaller workgroups more likely to develop rivalries than those in larger workgroups. Therefore, we concluded that one employee’s positive outcome would be more likely to evoke negative social

comparisons in the context of a smaller workgroup than a larger, and formulated the following proposition.

Proposition 7: An employee’s workgroup size will moderate the relationship between a coworker’s positive experience and an employee’s episodic envy. A coworker’s positive experience will lead to stronger episodic envy in an employee, in a smaller workgroup compared with larger workgroup.

We have examined factors that trigger social comparison in employees and that could lead them to experience episodic envy. We have not yet, however, specified the form—benign or malicious—that this envy assumes. This issue is taken up in the following discussion of the fairness of the coworker’s positive outcome and perceived control.

Distributive Justice as a Moderator of Benign and Malicious Envy

As mentioned, malicious envy differs from benign envy in that the former involves feelings of hostility and ill will toward the target of envy as well as the feelings of inferiority that are common to both types of envy. While social comparison processes give rise to both malicious and benign envy, a key moderator determining whether an employee experiences benign or malicious envy could be the extent to which he or she perceives the positive outcome to be fair in a distributive sense. Distributive justice refers to the extent to which a decision outcome is perceived as conforming to such implicit norms of allocation as equity, equality, or need (Colquitt, 2001).

Individuals often experience moral outrage when they perceive a violation of these norms (Bies, 1987). Thus, Feather and Sherman (2002) showed that individuals resent social targets who enjoy positive outcomes unfairly and that their resentment could lead them to undermine these targets. In examining antecedents of envy, Smith et al. (1994) found similarly that feelings of unfairness specifically predicted the hostile component of envy while feelings of inferiority predicted the depressive component. A study by Singer and colleagues (2006) found that individuals were less likely to empathize when someone who had acted unfairly experienced pain and indeed took pleasure in it. In light of these findings, we propose that an employee to feel hostility and ill will toward a coworker when he or she perceives the coworker as enjoying a positive experience in a distributively unfair manner. In contrast, we expect an employee is less likely to harbor hostility or ill will toward a coworker who enjoys a positive experience in a way that is deemed fair. When achieved fairly, the outcome is deserved and the achievement is more likely to motivate and inspire the observer.

Proposition 8: An employee will be more likely to experience malicious envy compared with benign envy, if he or she perceives a coworker’s positive experience as distributively unfair.

Perceived Control as a Moderator of Benign Envy and Malicious Envy

The other major aspect of negative comparison that gives rise to malicious, as opposed to benign envy is perceived control, that is,

the extent to which a perceiver considers a social target's success to be within the former's power to achieve (Smith & Kim, 2007). The ill will inherent in malicious envy is often attributed to a sense of frustration arising from a perceiver's belief that the advantage enjoyed by a target is unattainable (e.g., Elster, 1998; Smith, 1991; Vecchio, 1997). Conversely, when the advantage does seem to be attainable by the perceiver, the latter tends to feel motivated to improve (i.e., benign envy).

Empirical research on social comparison has provided further insights into the role of perceived control in the experience of malicious envy. In a study by Testa and Major (1990), all of the participants were told that they had performed poorly on a task compared with a superior social target, and then half were offered the opportunity to improve their performance—the “high control group”—while the other half were told that there would be no opportunity to improve—the “low control” group. Not surprisingly given the issues just discussed, the reactions of those in the low control group were significantly more hostile toward the superior social target than the reactions of those of the control group. Lockwood and Kunda (1997) showed likewise that exposure to a more successful other could have a debilitating effect on individuals' self-views when they believed that they could not themselves achieve similar success, while the belief that such success was attainable had an inspirational effect.

Therefore, it appears that individuals who have the perception of control in these respects are more likely to experience benign envy, with the attendant motivation for improvement (e.g., van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2011). We accordingly formulated the following proposition.

Proposition 9: An employee will be more likely to experience benign envy as compared with malicious envy in reaction to a coworker's positive experience, if he or she perceives high levels of control.

Having discussed triggers of episodic envy in the workplace, we next turn our attention to positive empathy. Proceeding from the notion that perspective taking is the main psychological process through which individuals experience positive empathy, we now identify ways in which perspective taking is evoked as a response to a coworker's positive experience.

Triggers of Perspective Taking

The perceiver's trait positive empathy. Like envy, positive empathy has been conceptualized as both an affective state and a personality trait (Morelli, Lieberman, et al., 2015). Thus far, research has identified a number of dispositional factors that contribute to individual differences in positive empathy, including a dispositional capacity for cognitive perspective taking (Andreychik & Migliaccio, 2015), the extent to which an individual has an interdependent self-construal (i.e., a tendency to view oneself in terms of relationships with others; Varnum et al., 2014), and positive affectivity (i.e., the tendency to experience pleasant emotions; Sallquist et al., 2009).

As mentioned, individuals tend to respond to specific events in ways that are largely consistent with their affective predispositions (Cropanzano et al., 1993). Therefore, just as we expected trait envy to predict episodic envy, we expected trait positive empathy to predict individuals' state positive empathy—specifically, those

with high levels of trait positive empathy were expected to engage readily and effectively in perspective taking in response to others' positive experiences. Moreover, because trait positive empathy is positively associated with positive affectivity, individuals with high trait positive empathy can be expected to experience particularly intense positive emotions in reaction to others' positive experiences. We accordingly formulated the following proposition.

Proposition 10: An employee's trait positive empathy will moderate the relationship between a coworker's positive experience and the employee's experience of state positive empathy. An employee with high levels of trait positive empathy will experience more frequent and stronger feelings of state positive empathy in reaction to a coworker's positive experience.

Shared group identity. A second factor that can trigger perspective taking is a shared group identity among employees. Group identities in organizations can develop based on various social categories, including similar expertise (e.g., engineers), demographic characteristics (e.g., gender or ethnicity), geographical locations, or tasks (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brickson & Brewer, 2001). A group identity shifts an individual's “perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person” (Turner, 1987, p. 50) and in this sense blurs the boundaries between the individual's notion of self and the others in the in-group (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). This self-other overlap increases the accuracy of an individual's inferences regarding the mental state of another member of his or her group. Indeed, it is well established in the perspective-taking literature that individuals find it easier to assume the perspectives of fellow members of a group with whom they share a common identity (e.g., Cikara et al., 2014; Molenberghs et al., 2014), even in the case of temporary groups (e.g., Cwir, Carr, Walton, & Spencer, 2011).

Another important aspect of group identity is that it shifts an individual's motivational focus from self-interest to the collective welfare of the group (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). That is, when the emphasis is on group welfare, the success of a fellow member of a group is more likely to be viewed positively by other members than when the emphasis is on self-interest. Thus, it has been found that individuals are more likely to experience happiness for positive outcomes of in-group members, compared with out-group members (Cikara et al., 2014; Molenberghs et al., 2014) and that group identity attenuates social comparison and envy, even when the comparison other receives a positive outcome in a domain that is relevant to the self (Kim & Glomb, 2014). We accordingly formulated the following proposition.

Proposition 11: A shared group identity will moderate the relationship between a coworker's positive experience and an employee's positive empathy; the relationship will be stronger under conditions of high shared group identity compared with low shared group identity.

Interpersonal liking. Interpersonal liking is defined as one individual's positive affective response to another (McPherson Frantz & Janoff-Bulman, 2000). Motivated information processing theory (De Dreu, Beersma, Stroebe, & Euwema, 2006) suggests

that such social motives as liking and wanting to be liked guide attention, encoding, and retention of information. Simply put, individuals pay greater attention to those whom they like, being more receptive to their information and social cues (Godfrey, Jones, & Lord, 1986; Jones & Pittman, 1982). This tendency in turn increases the capacity to accurately infer the thoughts and feelings of others who are liked (Ickes, 1997).

Consistent with these assertions, research on perspective taking has revealed that employees' engagement in perspective taking varies as a function of motivation (e.g., Batson et al., 1997; De Dreu, Weingart, & Kwon, 2000; Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006), and that individuals are much more motivated to take the perspective of those who they like (McPherson Frantz & Janoff-Bulman, 2000). In a series of studies, McPherson Frantz and Janoff-Bulman (2000) found that interpersonal liking has a "powerful and automatic" (p. 31) effect on individuals' willingness to accept and legitimize another person's perspective. Royzman and Rozin (2006) similarly found individuals to be more likely to experience positive empathy for those whom they like (e.g., close friends) than those whom they dislike or toward whom they are indifferent. In light of these considerations, we formulated the following proposal.

Proposition 12: Interpersonal liking will moderate the relationship between a coworker's positive experience and an employee's positive empathy; the relationship will be stronger under conditions of high interpersonal liking compared with low interpersonal liking.

Task interdependence. The last contextual factor that we have identified as contributing to perspective taking, and thereby to positive empathy, is task interdependence. Task interdependence refers to "the degree to which group members must rely on one another to perform their tasks effectively given the design of their jobs" (Saavedra, Earley, & Van Dyne, 1993, p. 61). Task interdependence influences interpersonal interactions among workgroup members. For example, as task interdependence increases, so does the need for employees to communicate, coordinate, and cooperate (Gersick, 1988, 1989; Kelly & McGrath, 1985). The level of task interdependence between two employees is, therefore, a determinant of the extent to which they interact and rely on each other.

A high level of interaction between two people can increase their capacity to adopt each other's perspective. Thus, research by Parker and Axtell (2001) on the antecedents of perspective taking in the workplace has shown that close collaboration and interaction among coworkers increases their perspective taking capacity. These findings are consistent with the suggestion in the adult cognitive development literature that perspective taking requires cognitive flexibility that can be gained through "exposure to alternative ways of thinking" (Weathersby, 1993, p. 80). Based on this research, we posited that task interdependence moderates employee's perspective taking, arguing specifically that employees have a greater capacity to assume the perspective of and to experience positive empathy toward those with whom they have high levels of task interdependence in comparison with those with whom they have little task interdependence. We accordingly formulated the following proposition.

Proposition 13: Task interdependence will moderate the relationship between a coworker's positive experience and an employee's positive empathy; the relationship will be stronger under conditions of high task interdependence compared with low task interdependence.

Next, we turn our attention to the outcomes of envy and positive empathy.

Outcomes of Envy and Positive Empathy

Envy and positive empathy are marked by pain and happiness, respectively, and as affective phenomena have important consequences in the workplace (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). The following discussion presents propositions for three important classes of outcomes—intrapersonal (job performance and well-being), interpersonal (dyadic relationship quality and helping behavior), and team effectiveness—that have theoretical justification and practical relevance. In theoretical terms, these propositions are justified by key characteristics of affect in general and by social emotions in particular (Lopez-Kidwell, Niven, & Labianca, in press; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). The thinking is that (a) emotions have important consequences for well-being, (b) affective processes are defining elements of workplace relationship quality, and (c) affective processes motivate (i.e., energize and direct) behaviors that have implications for individual job performance and team effectiveness. In practical terms, individual performance and well-being, interpersonal relationships, and team effectiveness are all important outcomes for employees and organizations alike.

In identifying and proposing outcomes, we focused on those for which there is strong theoretical reasoning and empirical justification. Thus, we have linked benign envy to performance and malicious envy and positive empathy to well-being, relationship quality, helping behavior, and team effectiveness (see Figure 1). Additional connections may exist between these predictors and outcomes. For example, Tai et al. (2012) suggested that malicious envy might be positively related to prosocial behavior given the political machinations in which those experiencing envy engage. The dominant tendency of individuals experiencing malicious envy, however, is to undermine the target. Similarly, positive empathy may have certain salutary performance implications—positive emotions have been linked to improved job performance (Wright, Cropanzano, & Bonett, 2007)—but these additional paths have indirect theoretical or empirical bases. For the sake of parsimony, we have presented only the most impactful outcomes in this article.

Intrapersonal Outcomes

Job performance. As described earlier, benign envy involves a motivation to achieve the envied outcome (van de Ven et al., 2009). This kind of envy is characterized by an action tendency to seek success for oneself (van de Ven, 2016). Empirical evidence of this motivational drive includes the findings of Crusius and Lange (2014) that an individual's experience of benign envy can direct his or her attention toward stimuli that are relevant to performance enhancement. Dispositional benign envy is similarly related to hope for success (an achievement-oriented motivation), as opposed to fear of failure (an avoidance-oriented motivation). The link

between benign envy and increased effort and performance has been demonstrated in a variety of settings (Crusius & Lange, 2014; Dineen et al., 2017; Lange & Crusius, 2015; van de Ven, 2016). For example, dispositional benign envy has been associated with goal setting and performance (i.e., speed) among marathon runners (Lange & Crusius, 2015). Likewise, in situations conducive to benign envy (i.e., the availability of time and an opportunity to strive for the desired outcome), it has been found that job search candidates prefer to expend extra effort to achieve the same desired outcome as an envied successful other rather than to use an unethical shortcut, such as a fraudulent resume (Dineen et al., 2017). In light of these considerations, we formulated the following proposition.

Proposition 14: Benign envy is positively related to job performance.

Well-being. Affect is central to the notion of well-being; specifically, low levels of negative affect and high levels of positive affect are its hallmarks (Diener, 2000). The harmful effects of malicious envy for individual well-being have been well documented in the literature (Smith & Kim, 2007). This kind of envy is defined by feelings of shortcomings, inferiority, deprivation, and ill will (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004) and is, as already mentioned, positively related to depressive moods and other negative emotions, including hostility and resentment (Smith & Kim, 2007) and distress (Thompson, Glasø, & Martinsen, 2015, 2016). Dispositional envy is negatively related to self-esteem and life satisfaction and positively related to depression, neuroticism, and hostility (Smith et al., 1999). Similarly, episodic envy is positively related to anxiety, depression, and negative moods (Cohen-Charash, 2009) and has also been implicated in the harmful effects of social media usage (e.g., feelings of envy underlie negative wellbeing effects of passive browsing on Facebook; Verduyn et al., 2015). In terms of work attitudes, envy is negatively related to job satisfaction and positively related to turnover intentions (Thompson et al., 2015; Vecchio, 1995). Further, while this notion was not directly examined in the course of the present research, there is sound reason to believe that malicious envy can have a negative impact on physical health, since several of the emotions associated with it, such as depression, anxiety, relative deprivation, and the sense of low control, have been shown to have this effect (Smith & Kim, 2007).

In contrast with malicious envy, positive empathy has been shown to increase individual well-being. At an episodic level, the experience of positive empathy evokes the emotional experience of happiness, which, for an individual, is in itself a desirable outcome. Further, the times we are experiencing a positive emotion, we are unlikely to be experiencing a negative emotion (such as anxiety or sadness; Smith & Kim, 2007). Moreover, positive emotions can enhance recovery from physiological reactivity to negative emotions (the “undo” effect; Fredrickson, Mancuso, Branigan, & Tugade, 2000).

As a positively valenced emotion, positive empathy overlaps conceptually with general positive affect; it plays a distinct role, however, in individuals’ life satisfaction beyond what is currently accounted for by positive affect and personality (i.e., extraversion; Morelli, Lieberman, et al., 2015). The capacity of positive empathy to predict additional variance in individuals’ well-being is not unexpected, for only so many positive experiences can be derived

for the self. Positive empathy increases the frequency of experienced joy because it creates opportunities to be happy at positive experiences of others as well as those of the self. From this perspective, an employee who experiences positive empathy has additional sources of happiness in the workplace beyond those available to an employee who does not experience it and, therefore, is likely to experience more frequent episodes of happiness.

Positive emotions, when repeatedly experienced, increase responsiveness to positive stimuli (Fehr, Fulmer, Awtrey, & Miller, 2017; Quidbach, Berry, Hansenne, & Mikolajczak, 2010). Thus, positive empathy is associated positively with joviality and negatively with fearfulness and sadness (Andreychik & Migliaccio, 2015). Over time, the frequent experience of positive empathy in the workplace has the potential to create a pervasive positive attitude among employees (Rosenberg, 1998; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). The many benefits of positive affect in the workplace include improved job satisfaction as well as spillover to nonwork settings that contribute to an overall sense of well-being (Sonnentag & Grant, 2012). We accordingly formulated the following propositions.

Proposition 15a: Malicious envy is negatively related to well-being.

Proposition 15b: Positive empathy is positively related to well-being.

Interpersonal Outcomes

Emotions motivate actions; social emotions, in particular, motivate actions targeted at other people (Hareli & Parkinson, 2008). Therefore, beyond intraindividual outcomes, positive empathy and malicious envy have implications on interpersonal relationships at work. Here we discuss three of the main interpersonal outcomes: Social undermining, helping behavior, and interpersonal relationship quality. The hostility experienced in malicious envy leads to undermining of the target of envy. On the other hand, positive empathy is associated with helping behavior and enhanced relationship quality.

Social undermining. Substantial evidence has been presented in the literature linking malicious envy with the negative interpersonal behaviors collectively referred to as social undermining (Duffy et al., 2012). Thus, the hostility inherent in malicious envy has been shown to lead individuals to undermine the reputations and performance of their targets (e.g., by providing misleading information; Cohen-Charash, 2009; Smith & Kim, 2007) and to engage in deviant activities intended to enhance their own positions relative to their targets (e.g., ostracism or gossip; Duffy et al., 2012). In a competitive climate, even those presently of relatively low status but expected to advance given their performance trajectories can be envied and targeted with social undermining (Reh, Tröster, & Van Quaquebeke, 2018). In light of this research, we expected malicious envy to be positively related to social undermining behavior in the workplace.

Proposition 16: Malicious envy is positively related to social undermining.

Helping behavior. Telle and Pfister (2016) argued that those experiencing positive empathy are more likely to engage in help-

ing behavior as a means to maintain their positive affect. Consistent with this argument, Andreychik and Migliaccio (2015) found positive empathy to be positively related to helping behavior, including random acts of kindness (e.g., greeting passersby) and support for a relationship partner. Morelli, Lieberman, et al. (2015) similarly reported a positive relationship between positive empathy—measured as a trait, state, and based on neural activity—and helping behavior. Finally, in a workplace context, Settoon and Mossholder (2002) found that high relationship quality marked by empathic concern predicted person-related and task-related interpersonal citizenship behaviors (ICBs). In their model, empathic concern in the relationship constituted the force “energizing and initiating person-focused ICB” (p. 258). We accordingly expected positive empathy to relate positively to helping behavior.

Proposition 16: Positive empathy is positively related to interpersonal helping behaviors.

Relationship quality. The affect generated in dyadic workplace relationships influences their form and trajectory (Lopez-Kidwell et al., in press). This is particularly true of such social emotions as envy and positive empathy, which are inherently interpersonal in nature. Research has distinguished social emotions in terms of congruence (Blader et al., 2010; Hareli & Parkinson, 2008). Congruent social emotions draw one individual closer to another, whereas incongruent emotions drive them apart, like the poles of a magnet (Blader et al., 2010). Thus, positive empathy, by creating the congruent emotion of happiness, draws individuals closer, while malicious envy, an incongruent emotion in that one individual experiences pain and the other experiences happiness, drives them apart. Empirical research supports this logic, as envy has indeed been associated with greater dislike toward and withdrawal from the envied person (Smith & Kim, 2007). For example, a study by Schaubroeck and Lam (2004) showed that, in the context of a competitive promotion system (i.e., in which only one member of a team could be promoted), those who were unsuccessful envied and eventually disliked the individual who received the promotion. We accordingly expect envy and the quality of interpersonal relationships to be negatively related.

Conversely, we expect positive empathy to have a positive influence on interpersonal relationship quality in the workplace. When one employee responds to another’s success with positive empathy, the relationship between them is strengthened in terms of interpersonal liking and warmth (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008; Morelli, Lieberman, et al., 2015). Not surprisingly, Morelli and colleagues (under review as cited in Morelli, Lieberman, et al., 2015) reported a positive relationship between positive empathy and social connection and a negative relationship between positive empathy and loneliness. We accordingly formulated the following pair of propositions.

Proposition 18a: Malicious envy is negatively related to the quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

Proposition 18b: Positive empathy is positively related to the quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

Team Effectiveness

We expected malicious envy and positive empathy to have implications for team effectiveness, which is a multidimensional

construct comprising a team’s performance and viability, its capacity to sustain its membership and existence (Bell & Marentette, 2011; Hackman, 1987). Various interconnected process variables contribute to team effectiveness that have been condensed into three broad “process mechanisms” by Marks, Mathieu, and Zaccaro (2001). One mechanism involves transition processes (i.e., such broad maintenance activities as ensuring clarity with regard to a team’s mission and goals); another involves action processes (such specific task-related activities as monitoring progress and coordination); and the third mechanism involves interpersonal processes (including conflict and affect management). While transition and action processes are relevant at the beginning and in the middle of a team’s performance cycle, respectively, interpersonal processes are vital throughout. All three process mechanisms are tightly interconnected with one another and with team effectiveness (LePine, Piccolo, Jackson, Mathieu, & Saul, 2008).

We proposed that envy and positive empathy impact team effectiveness primarily through the interpersonal process mechanism. As already explained, envy and positive empathy influence the manner in which employees relate to one another. Because malicious envy is related to a range of negative interpersonal behaviors, we expected it to impact team effectiveness negatively by increasing conflict and reducing trust and cohesion (Duffy & Shaw, 2000; Kim & Glomb, 2014). Empirical research has indeed shown envy to be negatively related to team cohesion, potency, performance, and satisfaction (Duffy & Shaw, 2000; Thompson et al., 2015) but positively related to social loafing (Thompson, Glasø, & Martinsen, 2016) and absenteeism (Duffy & Shaw, 2000). Moreover, perceptions of undermining among the members of a team can accrue and create a climate that can, in turn, strengthen the relationship between envy and undermining (Duffy et al., 2012). Positive empathy, by contrast, motivates interpersonal helping and strengthens relationships (Morelli et al., 2014; Pittinsky & Montoya, 2016; Telle & Pfister, 2016). We accordingly expected positive empathy to increase team effectiveness by fostering collaboration and cohesiveness within teams.

As employees interact within a team context, their individual emotions contribute to the emergence of a team-level emotional tone. Kelly and Barsade (2001) identified various input factors that contribute to a team’s emotional tone, including its members’ emotions, dispositional traits, and emotional intelligence. When employees on a team react to one another’s positive experiences with malicious envy, the emerging team-level emotional tone is bound to be negative. Conversely, when they react with positive empathy, a positive team-level emotional tone is likely to emerge. This latter outcome should lead to positive consequences for the team, such as greater cooperation and decreased conflict (Barsade, 2002). Such favorable team outcomes can lead to further positive emotions in team members, creating a positive feedback loop in the input-process-output model of positive team-level emotions that contributes to sustained team effectiveness (Walter & Bruch, 2008). We accordingly formulated the following pair of propositions.

Proposition 19a: Team-level malicious envy is negatively related to team effectiveness.

Proposition 19b: Team-level positive empathy is positively related to team effectiveness.

Discussion

We have developed a theoretical framework to explain employees' responses to their coworkers' positive experiences. In doing so, we introduced the concept of positive empathy as an alternative response to envy and distinguished it from related concepts, explained the psychological processes that underlie envy and positive empathy, and identified individual and contextual contingencies that may incline employees to respond with either envy or positive empathy. We further discussed the potentially important individual and organizational outcomes related to envy and positive empathy. This theoretical framework has significant implications for management research and practice.

Theoretical Implications

By considering positive empathy as a response to a coworker's positive outcome or state (collectively referred to as positive experiences), we addressed a longstanding asymmetry in the organizational literature, namely the singular focus on envy as employees' primary response to their coworkers' positive experiences. Our theoretical model, by taking into account both positive and negative affective responses, has provided a basis for further inquiry into the nature and roles of interpersonal relationships in organizations. The work presented here stands to contribute to organizational research in several specific areas.

Emotions at work. With regard to emotion, we have advanced theory and research in four main respects, in the first place by calling attention to the underexamined affective experience of positive empathy. Although there is an emerging body of literature on positive empathy in the social psychology literature, there is minimal research on the role of positive empathy in organizations. By proposing positive empathy as an alternative response to envy, we have expanded the current parameters for understanding employees' reactions to coworkers' positive experiences. Our second contribution to the study of emotions is integration of the concepts of malicious envy, benign envy, and positive empathy into a single analytical framework, an approach that has helped to explain when and why employees react with a given emotion. Third, our analysis of envy and positive empathy has shed light on the social and interpersonal nature of emotions; for, as Hareli and Rafaeli (2008) noted, emotions have been traditionally studied "as a within-person, one-direction, nonrepetitive phenomenon; focus has traditionally been on how one individual feels in reaction to various stimuli at a certain point of time" (p. 35). Our analysis has explained specifically the manner in which envy and positive empathy emerge based on their capacity to weaken or strengthen interpersonal and social relationships. Lastly, we have identified specific outcomes of envy and positive empathy. The former have been well researched, but management scholars have yet to consider the organizational outcomes of positive empathy. We have proposed that positive empathy can have a significant effect on individual well-being, interpersonal relationships, and organizational outcomes.

Teams and interpersonal relationships. Because organizations rely increasingly on work teams, individuals' ability (or inability) to function effectively in team environments has important implications for organizational performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Given the importance of interpersonal relationships in the workplace, scholars have called for more research on factors

affecting the quality and formation of workplace relationships (Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Ferris et al., 2009). We have answered this call by approaching employees' reactions to their coworkers' successes as an important determinant of team cohesiveness and productivity. Specifically, we identified the contributions of such attributes of work teams as size, leader-member-exchange relationships, and reward practices to envy, and examined in-group membership and task interdependence as factors that contribute to positive empathy.

We further discussed the potentially important implications of envy and positive empathy for team performance. Although there have been some studies on the deleterious effects of envy on team productivity, virtually no empirical research has examined the ways in which positive empathy can improve team performance and interpersonal relationships at work. This article has offered a theoretical foundation for new empirical research to emerge in this area.

Work motivation. The study of envy and positive empathy contributes to the work motivation literature in various ways. On the one hand, it has been shown that anticipation of either envy or positive empathy in others can motivate employees to behave in very different ways, with the anticipation of envy discouraging individuals from starting new ventures and growing their existing businesses (Kirkwood, 2007). When individuals' efforts to grow and succeed have been thwarted by fear of envy, they can be expected, conversely, to put in greater effort when others are likely to rejoice at their success. Indeed, research on work motivation has indicated that individuals pursue goals because of extrinsic rewards, including recognition by important others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). To this end, the anticipation of positive empathy in others could serve as an extrinsic motivator for employees to achieve personal and organizational goals.

Envy and positive empathy also motivate the perceiver to behave in different ways. It has been established that malicious envy motivates employees to undermine others and engage in deviant activities (Duffy et al., 2012; Kim & Glomb, 2014), while benign envy motivates employees to improve (van de Ven et al., 2009). We have built a case that positive empathy can enhance employees' well-being and improve the quality of their interpersonal relationships, their helping behavior, and overall team effectiveness. Given the relatively positive effects of benign envy, organizational scholars have advocated creating situations in which employees feel this emotion rather than malicious envy. From the perspective advanced here, however, while improvements in individual performance that benefit organizations can be motivated by benign envy, positive empathy can be more beneficial in terms of collaboration and creativity.

Future Research Directions

More broadly, our research emphasizes the significance of employees' affective reactions to others' positive experiences. As has been seen, though the outcomes of envy in the workplace have received considerable attention in the organizational literature, its antecedents have not. In fact, virtually every article on envy proceeds from the assumption that it is an inevitable and indeed inherent aspect of the workplace. We have challenged this notion by identifying the antecedents of envy and positive empathy as a means of explaining when and why individuals may have one of

these affective experiences rather than the other. Based on the argumentation presented here, future research should continue to focus on the antecedent conditions of envy in organizations rather than treating it as a default response.

The nature of positive empathy in organizational contexts represents a potentially fruitful avenue of research. As discussed, the validity of positive empathy, both as a state and as a trait, has already been empirically established in the social psychology literature (Morelli, Lieberman, et al., 2015). The recognized measure of trait positive empathy (i.e., the Positive Empathy Scale) has been validated across several samples, showing strong internal reliability and temporal stability. State positive empathy, on the other hand, has been measured using surveys (self-report and other-report measures; e.g., Morelli, Lee, et al., 2015), the daily diary method (Morelli et al., under review as cited in Morelli, Lieberman, et al., 2015), observational coding (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004; Maisel, Gable, & Strachman, 2008), and biological measures (Light et al., 2009; Morelli & Lieberman, 2013). State positive empathy has also been manipulated experimentally in several studies (Cikara et al., 2014; Varnum et al., 2014). Overall, then, despite being a relatively recent construct, positive empathy has received considerable empirical support and, for this and other reasons, is likely to emerge as an important subfield within organizational research.

A necessary preliminary step in such research is of course to establish empirically that positive empathy does indeed play a significant role in organizations. We proposed that trait positive empathy exerts a positive influence on employees' well-being—by promoting the willingness to engage in helping behavior—and improved relationship quality overall. We concluded by positing that positive empathy facilitates teamwork, particularly in the context of such interpersonal processes as defusing conflict and increasing cooperation and cohesion. Following this line of reasoning, future research could also examine organizational practices that enhance employees' experiences of state positive empathy and diminish malicious envy. The antecedents of positive empathy and envy and their underlying psychological mechanisms have been outlined here. Our propositions have pointed the way for future research to explore the design of such specific organizational practices as performance reviews and feedback and reward systems in ways that decrease employees' tendency to experience malicious envy and enhance their tendency to experience positive empathy.

Practical Implications

Organizations derive obvious benefits when they nurture environments in which high-performing individuals feel safe enjoying their successes. To be sure, some research has reported motivational benefits for those who feel benign envy (e.g., van de Ven, 2016; van de Ven et al., 2009, 2011), but the reported effects for the target of envy have been mostly negative (e.g., Duffy et al., 2012; Kim & Glomb, 2014; Reh et al., 2018). To ensure that high performers are in fact supported and emulated by their coworkers rather than vilified, managers need to understand the psychology of envy and positive empathy and the conditions that foster and that discourage these divergent affective reactions. The propositions regarding antecedents of envy and positive empathy presented here were intended as suggestions for managers seeking to

decrease malicious envy and to foster positive empathy in the workplace.

There are a number of steps that organizations can take to manage envy in the workplace. To begin with, they can discourage it by avoiding zero-sum reward systems and those that are focused exclusively on individuals. As mentioned, these types of reward systems trigger social comparison in employees, compelling them to interpret others' positive outcomes as personal losses. Second, managers must strive to remain consistent in their treatment of subordinates. While some level of differentiated leadership may be unavoidable, it is important to keep in mind that preferential treatment toward some subordinates can trigger envy in others so that the former become targets of interpersonal deviance (Vecchio, 2005). Third, when rewarding and celebrating high-performing employees, managers should be sure not only to maintain the norms of distributive justice but also to communicate to others why it is fair to reward and celebrate high performers. Proactive management of employees' perceptions of justice in this way could ameliorate any resentment toward those who receive special recognition or rewards. Fourth, managers can further alleviate malicious envy toward high-performing employees by instilling a sense of control in others, for example by explaining to employees how they too can achieve similar success and creating situations, such as mentoring programs, in which other employees can learn from high performers.

Reducing malicious envy is an important first step, but more can be done in the way of improving employees' reactions to their peers' positive outcomes, in particular by nurturing positive empathy, for example by strengthening the sense of collective identity within a workgroup through team-building exercises, social events that emphasize shared values, and organizational routines. Positive empathy can also be promoted by structuring workgroups and tasks so as to encourage perspective-taking by workers. Parker and Axtell (2001), for example, have reported that autonomy and interaction with others facilitate perspective-taking in the workplace. Similarly and lastly, employees' capacity to experience positive empathy can be enhanced through training in perspective-taking, for the effectiveness of perspective-taking interventions in cultivating empathy has been demonstrated in a diverse range of professionals, including physicians, police officers, and teachers (Lam, Kolomito, & Alamparambil, 2011).

Limitations

While our article makes a number of important contributions to the literature, it is not, of course, without boundaries and limitations. First, we acknowledge the context-specific nature of our analysis, for individuals may experience positive empathy and envy in a variety of social situations with distinct antecedents and outcomes. Here we have analyzed these emotions specifically with respect to organizations, meaning that any antecedents and outcomes that we have identified were specific to a given organizational context.

A second limitation is that research on envy and positive empathy spans multiple scientific domains. Thus, for example, work in neuroscience has identified physiological differences in the brain structures of individuals that are said to account for differences in the ability to experience positive empathy (Yue, Pan, & Huang, 2016). However, while the approach taken here was in-

formed by this multidisciplinary research, we have, for the sake of parsimony, discussed only literature directly relevant to organizational behavior. We have noted, for instance, that individuals differ in their levels of trait positive empathy, but have not delved into psychophysiological bases of trait empathy.

Third, we note that our analysis of envy and positive empathy bears some relation to the so-called bandwidth-fidelity dilemma (Cronbach & Gleser, 1965). This term refers to the tradeoffs involved in using narrowly defined constructs (i.e., those with high fidelity and low bandwidth) rather than more broadly defined constructs (i.e., those with low fidelity and high bandwidth) when predicting outcomes of interest. As a way to minimize bandwidth-fidelity tradeoffs, theorists have recommended that the bandwidth of a criterion variable be matched with that of the predictor variable (Hogan & Roberts, 1996). To this end, it has been proposed that specific emotions are better predictors of specific action tendencies, whereas the broader construct of affect is a better predictor of aggregate or broad-spectrum outcomes (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Accordingly, because one of the key purposes of this article was to explain how envy and positive empathy influence individual and organizational outcomes, we formulated our outcome-related propositions with positive empathy and envy as criterion variables regardless of the bandwidth of the outcome (e.g., intrapersonal, interpersonal, or team-level). While this approach served the specific purposes of the present article, it must be noted that aggregate or broadly defined outcomes may be better predicted by general affect as opposed to such specific emotions as positive empathy and envy.

Lastly, as mentioned, we only outlined the predominant behavioral and attitudinal tendencies with respect to envy and positive empathy. If contextual contingencies and indirect relationships were considered, these emotions might be found to relate to a variety of outcomes. For this reason, we acknowledge that envy and positive empathy may predict additional outcomes that were not discussed in this article.

Conclusion

Organizations present their employees with many opportunities to experience feelings of envy, but we have argued that they need not respond to one another's positive experiences in this way. Thus, we introduced the concept of positive empathy as an alternative reaction to envy and explained the circumstances under which and the reasons for which employees might feel positive empathy rather than envy. Interpersonal relationships are naturally the building blocks of organizational life, and employees' reactions to one another's successes have important implications for individuals, interpersonal relationships, and organizations. It is our hope that the theoretical framework developed in this article will provide a foundation for further study of the emergence and consequences of envy and positive empathy in organizational settings.

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