

Envy is a sin

[Sociology](#), [Poverty](#)



As all emotions, envy is socially constructed. Individual interaction, class variation and social institutions like schools, family, religion, and politics define envy for us. Envy is dependent on the beliefs about wealth, status, power, and how they ought to be distributed. In less complex societies envious objects are food, babies, and health; but in more complex societies they are wealth, status, and power. Envy, which is often mislabeled as jealousy, is hostility towards superiors. In an unequal situation, or comparison the envious has, not a mere wish, but a malicious wish that the other would lose his advantage (Foster, 1972: 167).

Though condemned in all cultures and repressed in nearly every individual, envy has a function in society. Schoeck points out that envy is almost a taboo-topic in daily conversation, in research, and in literature. This condemning and repression is what allows envy to work. Envy in excess of that minimum is a surplus, which can do more harm than good (Schoeck, 1970: 348). In societies where envy is high productivity is low and where envy is low productivity is high. Envy is our drive for innovation and competition, though if not controlled causes poverty and revolutions.

Management of envy is key to social order. In order to minimize envy we must always rationalize our inequalities through modest statements such as; " Luck", " God" s will", and " hard work", which date back through the history of the Greeks, Roman Catholic Church, and the Protestant Work Ethic.

Although possibly the rich are wealth addicts, thriving on the envy of others, and the rest are all closet addicts fooled into believing that they will one day be rich too (Slater, 1980: 16).