

Paradoxical Reactions to Being Envied: An Agency-Communion Self-Perspective

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Date: 2023-08-04T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

Star employees in organizations often become targets of envy due to their outstanding performance. Being envied may trigger both positive and negative experiences for employees, thereby producing inconsistent effects on job performance and interpersonal behavior. Existing research lacks an in-depth, meticulous, and systematically comprehensive synthesis and explanation of these inconsistent findings. Based on the dual-perspective model of agency and communion, this study explores the differential effects of being envied on individuals' self-cognition, self-experience, and self-regulation, and identifies relevant boundary conditions by focusing on the relative importance of agency and communion for individuals, with the aim of enhancing systematic understanding of the effects of being envied, outlining future research directions, and providing insights for organizations to adopt effective intervention measures regarding the issue of star employees being envied.

Full Text

The Paradoxical Reactions to Being Envied: A Self-Perspective Based on Agency and Communion

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Abstract

High-performing individuals within organizations frequently become targets of envy due to their exceptional achievements. Being envied can elicit both positive and negative experiences, which in turn produce inconsistent effects on work performance and interpersonal behavior. Existing research lacks a thorough, nuanced, and systematic examination of these divergent findings. Drawing on the dual perspective model of agency and communion, this paper explores how being

envied differentially affects individuals' self-cognition, self-experience, and self-regulation. By focusing on the relative importance of agency and communion for individuals, we identify relevant boundary conditions to enhance systematic understanding of the effects of being envied, outline future research directions, and provide insights for organizations to develop effective interventions for managing envy toward star employees.

Keywords: being envied, agency, communion, dual perspective model, self

Received: 2023-05-13

Funding: This research was supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (23JNQMX10) and the Private Enterprise Project of Jinan University Enterprise Development Institute (2021MYZD05).

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With the rise of the service and digital economies, organizational survival and development increasingly depend on the quality of human capital. Star employees not only demonstrate exceptional individual performance but also enhance colleagues' performance through knowledge spillover, playing a crucial role in organizational development (Kehoe et al., 2018). Many organizations invest substantial resources to motivate and retain these high performers. However, these star employees, who possess scarce resources, may become targets of coworker envy (Puranik et al., 2019), triggering a series of problems (Asgari et al., 2021). Given that being envied can affect organizations in terms of performance and interpersonal relations, examining its underlying mechanisms is essential.

When individuals achieve success, they may perceive that others envy them. The feeling of being envied represents an individual's perception of others' envy, encompassing cognitive appraisals of being envied by others (Liu et al., 2018). Regarding performance, being envied has contradictory effects on work engagement and job performance (Lee et al., 2018; Treadway et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2019). Interpersonally, because the perception of being envied has a clear source, envied individuals naturally exhibit behavioral reactions directed toward the enviers. They may help others (van de Ven et al., 2010), ingratiate themselves with colleagues, and engage in more organizational citizenship behaviors (Scott et al., 2015), thereby strengthening relationships and promoting organizational development. Conversely, they may reduce organizational citizenship behaviors (Ye et al., 2021) and knowledge sharing (Xu et al., 2021), engage in knowledge hiding (Liu et al., 2020), and even behave uncivilly toward colleagues (Mao et al., 2021), damaging relationships and hindering organizational development.

Early research on these paradoxical reactions primarily adopted the "sensitivity about being the target of a threatening upward comparison" (STTUC; Exline & Lobel, 1999) perspective, emphasizing that envied individuals worry that their superior performance may cause interpersonal tension and rupture, leading to negative experiences such as anxiety and distress. Consequently, they may respond by being modest or reducing performance to mitigate others' hostility

(Henagan & Bedeian, 2009), or through ingratiation and interpersonal citizenship behaviors to repair damaged relationships (Scott et al., 2015). Recent studies have also drawn on social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), suggesting that envied individuals may “passively” engage in downward comparisons to satisfy self-enhancement needs, thereby generating positive emotions (Li et al., 2020). This aligns with earlier research indicating that being envied can trigger positive experiences such as confidence, pride, and self-affirmation (Exline & Zell, 2012; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2010) and provides theoretical support for these findings.

Thus, being envied presents clear duality in individuals’ emotions, performance, and behaviors, exerting different influences on employee relations and organizational development. Two distinct theoretical explanations for the same phenomenon not only fragment existing research findings and violate the principle of theoretical parsimony (Occam’s razor) but also impede future research development. Practically, lacking a holistic understanding of why being envied produces paradoxical reactions in star employees hinders organizations from developing effective management measures and solutions. Therefore, this research area requires a unified theoretical framework to explain the phenomenon of being envied, enhance researchers’ systematic grasp of its effects, open new avenues for future research on its consequences, mechanisms, and boundary conditions, and provide guidance for practitioners to intervene in envy toward star employees.

To address this issue, scholars have proposed that individuals evaluate how being envied affects their pursuit of two major goals—“getting ahead” and “getting along”—which in turn generates different emotional activities and behavioral responses (Lee et al., 2018). This reflects two fundamental dimensions of human existence: agency and communion. Consequently, the dual perspective model of agency and communion (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014) holds promise for integrating inconsistent findings and more comprehensively explaining the consequences of being envied. This paper first elucidates the essential reasons for these divergent effects from the perspective of self-cognition, then expands the consequences of being envied from single-dimensional emotional activity to broader self-experience, subsequently categorizes behavioral reactions to being envied at the level of self-regulation, and finally identifies boundary conditions that moderate these mechanisms. Based on this framework, we aim to enhance researchers’ systematic understanding of the effects of being envied, outline future research directions, and provide insights for organizations to implement effective interventions that reduce the negative impacts of being envied on individual performance, interpersonal relationships, and organizational development while guiding envied star employees to exert positive influences.

2. The Paradoxical Reactions to Being Envied

Being envied is an ambivalent experience (Liu et al., 2018). On one hand, envy from others indicates that the envied individual possesses certain status,

reputation, or qualities that are recognized and desired (Parrott, 2017), potentially eliciting feelings of pride and satisfaction (Wills, 1981). On the other hand, individuals desire not only personal success but also to maintain interpersonal relationships and interact amicably with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Envy from others signals that the envied individual's advantages have disrupted interpersonal equilibrium, potentially causing dissatisfaction, frustration, resentment, or hostility from the envier. This tense relationship can make the envied individual feel threatened and distressed (Parrott, 2017). Table 1 summarizes the current state of research on the consequences of being envied.

2.1 Positive Experiences and Consequences of Being Envied

When envied individuals interpret others' envy as positive social information related to their status and advantages, they recognize that their performance surpasses others and that they have achieved something desired by organizational members. This enhances their agentic self-concept and generates positive emotions (Lee et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021), such as pride (Lee et al., 2018) and job satisfaction (Su, 2020). Additionally, because envy from others indicates that the envied individual possesses valuable qualities or achievements (Parrott & Smith, 1993), those who value their image in others' eyes feel affirmed, leading to greater confidence (Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2010).

Positive experiences of being envied drive improvements in work performance. First, the sense of superiority triggered by being envied helps individuals recognize their value and the meaning of their work. Second, positive emotional experiences not only ignite work passion and strengthen motivation, guiding envied individuals toward a positive mental state (Huang et al., 2019), but also enhance their sense of security in exploring new work processes and possibilities, providing more resources and energy. This strengthens work engagement, prompting envied individuals to exert greater effort in pursuing privileges, rewards, and self-improvement, ultimately resulting in high-level job performance (Lee et al., 2018).

Positive experiences of being envied also trigger a series of behavioral responses. Envied individuals may engage in self-enhancement, particularly when envious individuals express admiration and ingratiation, without significantly reducing such behaviors when envious individuals show hostility and malice (Parrott, 2017). Moreover, the energy derived from positive emotions enables envied individuals to view organizational problems from new perspectives, leading to more voice behavior and novel ideas and solutions (Zhang et al., 2021). However, some envied individuals may attempt to intensify others' envy by directly flaunting their superiority to attract attention (Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2010). This may stem from the desire to establish dominance and elevate status by intensifying envy, or from the wish to retaliate and humiliate by amplifying the envier's pain (Parrott & Rodriguez Mosquera, 2008).

2.2 Negative Experiences and Consequences of Being Envied

When envied individuals interpret others' envy as negative social information that threatens their relationships, they feel anxious and concerned about potential hostility from others, believing their achievements have caused potential interpersonal conflict. This generates negative emotions (Lee et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021), such as anxiety (Lee et al., 2018), tension, depression (Scott et al., 2015), and job burnout (Su, 2020).

Negative experiences of being envied lead to reduced work performance. First, the social defeat feeling triggered by being envied diminishes the meaning and security of pursuing further success. Second, regulating negative emotions consumes cognitive resources that could otherwise be allocated to work, suppressing work engagement and ultimately making it difficult for envied individuals to complete tasks effectively, thereby reducing job performance (Lee et al., 2018). Furthermore, for narcissistic individuals, being envied means others will distance themselves, causing them to lose targets for social comparison and self-worth validation. This motivates them to proactively reduce performance and maintain interpersonal relationships to preserve self-worth (Treadway et al., 2019).

Negative experiences of being envied also produce various interpersonal consequences. First, envious may harm envied individuals through covert means such as reducing cooperation or engaging in interpersonal deviance (Pan et al., 2021; Tai et al., 2022, 2023). This leads envied individuals to perceive reduced help from colleagues, experience social undermining (Sun et al., 2021), workplace ostracism (Liu et al., 2019; Mao et al., 2021; Ng, 2017; Wang & Li, 2018; Zhan et al., 2018), and incivility (Howard et al., 2021).

Second, poor interpersonal interactions damage envied individuals' coworker exchange relationships (Deng & Wang, 2023; Ye et al., 2021) and reduce psychological safety (Zheng et al., 2022), widening interpersonal distance within the organization and decreasing the meaning of helping colleagues. To avoid further contact and protect themselves, envied individuals engage in silence behavior (Zhang et al., 2021) and reduce organizational citizenship behaviors (Ye et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2022). Persistent or severe negative experiences may also lead envied individuals to withdraw from the social comparison environment, generating high turnover intentions (Scott et al., 2015) and ultimately voluntary departure (Ng, 2017) to avoid further discomfort.

Finally, fearing malicious intent from others, envied individuals may engage in more helping behavior to appease envious (van de Ven et al., 2010) or strengthen social connections through ingratiation and interpersonal citizenship behaviors to repair damaged relationships (Scott et al., 2015). However, beyond "returning good for evil," envied individuals may also become more selfish due to negative experiences. To maintain their superior status, cope with, or retaliate against envious' hostility, they may "return evil for evil" by reducing knowledge sharing (Xu et al., 2021), engaging in knowledge hiding (Liu et al., 2020), or even exhibiting incivility toward colleagues (Mao et al., 2021).

In summary, being envied is a complex phenomenon. On one hand, it signifies that an individual possesses something, status, characteristics, or qualities desired by others (Smith & Kim, 2007), achieving success and triggering positive emotional experiences and subsequent behavioral reactions. On the other hand, it indicates that the individual has become a “thorn in others’ side,” potentially suffering hostility and dissatisfaction, thereby generating negative emotional experiences and subsequent behavioral reactions.

However, existing literature exhibits clear theoretical limitations in explaining these paradoxical reactions. If individuals do not perceive hostility when being envied, they “may not necessarily worry about the consequences, may not be sensitive about being an upward comparison target, and may even be pleased about being envied” (Liu et al., 2018, p. 120). In such cases, STTUC theory struggles to explain the positive feelings triggered by being envied. Similarly, social comparison theory cannot adequately explain the negative feelings elicited by being envied. Evidently, explaining the emotional experiences and behavioral reactions to being envied from a single perspective hinders a comprehensive and unified understanding of its effects.

We argue that social comparison theory’s focus on “how one views oneself” and STTUC theory’s focus on “how others view oneself” align remarkably well with the two fundamental dimensions of human existence—agency and communion, thus providing a potential intersection point for these two theories. Therefore, this paper constructs a theoretical framework based on the dual perspective model of agency and communion and its extensions (see Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]) to explain how being envied differentially affects individuals’ self-cognition, self-experience, and self-regulation, and identifies boundary conditions based on the relative importance of agency and communion for the individual.

3. Paradoxical Reactions to Being Envied from the Dual Perspective Model

Human life involves two recurring needs: pursuing personal goals and establishing social connections (Ybarra et al., 2008). These needs reflect the fundamental dimensions of agency and communion, which underlie numerous psychological phenomena, including personality traits, interpersonal problems, values, motivations, social cognition, self-concept, and self-efficacy (Pan et al., 2017; Abele & Wojciszke, 2018; Locke, 2012). Agency focuses on the individual and the pursuit of personal goals, emphasizing self-realization, power and status attainment, and acting for one’s own benefit (Abele et al., 2021; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007)—that is, “getting ahead.” Communion focuses on the collective and integration into social relationships, emphasizing relationship formation and maintenance, harmony attainment, and acting for others’ benefit (Abele et al., 2021; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007)—that is, “getting along.” The dual perspective model posits that these fundamental dimensions connect differently to the basic perspectives of social interaction: the actor perspective and the observer perspective. How

individuals interpret social behavior depends on their perspective (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014). Actors focus on goal achievement and action efficiency, thus attending primarily to the agentic meaning of social behavior. Observers focus on identifying action consequences and whether the actor's intentions benefit or harm them, thus attending primarily to the communal meaning of social behavior.

The extended dual perspective model (Hauke & Abele, 2020c) further proposes that individuals can view themselves from both actor and observer perspectives. From the actor perspective, individuals view themselves internally, focusing on the self and its goals, plans, and self-viewpoints to develop and maintain self-identity—that is, “how one views oneself.” From the observer perspective, individuals view themselves externally, focusing on cues in the social environment that indicate damaged interpersonal relationships to develop and maintain self-reputation—that is, “how others view oneself.” The actor-self and observer-self intertwine and influence each other, jointly constituting a complete self. Moreover, the actor-self relates more to agency because agency facilitates personal goal achievement, while the observer-self relates more to communion because communion facilitates relationship formation and maintenance.

Based on this, we conceptualize being envied as a complex event containing both agentic and communal meanings that may differentially affect individuals' self-awareness. Self-awareness comprises three psychological components: self-cognition, self-experience, and self-regulation (Shi, 1998). Specifically, when individuals engage in self-cognition from the actor perspective, focusing more on information about their own success, being envied strengthens their agentic self-concept. When individuals engage in self-cognition from the observer perspective, focusing more on information about interpersonal threats, being envied weakens their communal self-concept. Information about agency and communion influences individuals' emotions and behaviors (Cuddy et al., 2007). Therefore, the differential effects of being envied on agentic versus communal self-concept further trigger different self-experiences and self-regulation. Strengthened agentic self-concept creates a sense of self-control, enhancing self-esteem, eliciting positive emotional experiences, and leading individuals to view obstacles as challenges rather than threats. Weakened communal self-concept creates a sense of vulnerability, reducing self-esteem, eliciting negative emotional experiences, and causing individuals to view obstacles as threats rather than challenges (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014).

3.1 Being Envied, Self-Cognition, and Self-Experience

Being envied strengthens individuals' agentic self-concept, thereby triggering positive self-experience. Self-concept relates to how one thinks about oneself (Rosenberg, 1965). When individuals engage in self-cognition from the actor perspective, focusing on the positive social information about status and advantages conveyed by being envied, they recognize that their performance surpasses others and that they have achieved something desired by organizational

members, fulfilling the “getting ahead” goal. This strengthens their agentic self-concept. For example, career success and task achievement enhance individuals’ agentic self-concept (Abele, 2003; Abele et al., 2008). Moreover, positive agentic self-concept brings positive emotional experiences; successful individuals who develop high agentic cognition show increased positive emotions (Baryła & Wojciszke, 2019). Therefore, when individuals engage in self-cognition about being envied from the actor perspective, they view themselves as having achieved success, strengthening their agentic self-concept and generating positive self-experiences such as pride, confidence, and self-affirmation (Lee et al., 2018; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2010).

Being envied weakens individuals’ communal self-concept, thereby triggering negative self-experience. When individuals engage in self-cognition from the observer perspective, focusing more on the negative social information about relationship threats conveyed by being envied, they recognize that they possess something, qualities, or abilities desired but not possessed by others, creating potential interpersonal conflict and hindering the “getting along” goal. This weakens their communal self-concept. For example, gossip from others, especially communal gossip, creates strong reputation threats that weaken individuals’ communal self-concept (Hauke & Abele, 2020b, 2020c). Additionally, negative communal self-concept brings negative emotional experiences; individuals affected by others’ negative moral gossip experience strong negative emotions (Hauke & Abele, 2020b). Therefore, when individuals engage in self-cognition about being envied from the observer perspective, they view themselves as facing hostility, damaging harmony goals, weakening their communal self-concept, and generating negative self-experiences such as tension, anxiety, and depression (Lee et al., 2018; Scott et al., 2015).

3.2 Self-Regulation When Being Envied

The effects of being envied on self-concept and self-experience may trigger different self-regulation strategies. Self-regulation follows a well-established feedback mechanism: when the actual self meets the ideal self’s requirements, individuals feel pleased and maintain their current behavior (“maintenance”). When the actual self fails to meet requirements, if individuals believe they can change behavior to meet standards, they exert effort to achieve them (“change”). However, if individuals believe they cannot change behavior to meet standards, they become conflicted and begin to deliberately avoid, distract, or deny the problem’s existence (“avoidance”) (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Shi, 1998).

Research on the dual perspective model shows that success experiences strengthen individuals’ agentic self-concept, predicting short-term and long-term career success (Abele, 2003; Abele & Spurk, 2011), while failure experiences weaken communal self-concept, causing significant distress (Ybarra et al., 2008, 2012). Individuals may instinctively avoid or focus on repairing damaged self-concept (Locke, 2015). For example, individuals with insecure attachment styles formed from adverse childhood interactions show stronger

avoidance tendencies toward adult partners (Locke, 2008), while experiencing social exclusion enhances interest in making friends and cooperating with others (Maner et al., 2007). This may explain why envied individuals maintain self-enhancement when driven by positive self-experience (Parrott, 2017), while those driven by negative self-experience may either repair damaged relationships through helping (van de Ven et al., 2010), ingratiation, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Scott et al., 2015) or reduce organizational citizenship behaviors to minimize contact and protect themselves (Ye et al., 2021).

3.3 Boundary Conditions of the Effects of Being Envied

The extended dual perspective model notes that although actor-self and observer-self constitute a complete self, one perspective may become more salient in certain contexts, affecting self-cognition, self-experience, and self-regulation (Hauke & Abele, 2020c). The more an event relates to subjectively important goals, the stronger individuals' reactions. For instance, agency pursuit predicts stronger reactions to achievement-related events, while communion pursuit predicts stronger reactions to interpersonal events (Locke, 2003; Zell & Exline, 2014). Given that numerous factors influence the relative importance of agency and communion, we integrate boundary conditions from individual and cultural levels to explain when being envied more strongly affects agentic versus communal self-concept from a unified theoretical perspective.

3.3.1 Individual Level At the individual level, factors such as gender, age, personality traits, and cognitive style may moderate the effects of being envied on self-cognition and self-experience. First, gender differences exist in agency and communion dimensions; men tend to show agentic orientation, focusing more on task achievement and being more confident, while women tend to show communal orientation, focusing more on socio-emotional exchange and more accurately judging others' emotions (Rucker et al., 2018). Research shows that agency has a stronger effect on self-esteem for men, while communion has a stronger effect for women (Gebauer et al., 2013), and women experience stronger distress than men when being envied (Exline & Zell, 2012).

Second, the relative importance of agency and communion changes dynamically across the lifespan. Agency motivation peaks in early adulthood (Locke, 2015). However, as individuals transition from early to middle and late adulthood, their attention shifts from pursuing agentic goals to pursuing communal goals. The importance of success and power typically decreases, while the importance of protecting and caring for others increases (Robinson, 2013). Studies show that agency's effect on self-esteem weakens with age, while communion's effect strengthens (Gebauer et al., 2013). Younger employees indeed experience stronger positive emotions from being envied compared to older employees (Li et al., 2020).

Third, narcissism is a personality trait characterized by an exaggerated and inflated self-concept, leading individuals to focus primarily on agentic goals

such as power and status (Campbell et al., 2010). Narcissists constantly seek self-enhancement and maintain positive self-evaluations, experiencing positive emotions such as pride and excitement when these goals are achieved, while their self-esteem is enhanced (Tracy et al., 2009). Indeed, narcissistic individuals experience stronger positive emotions when outperforming others (Exline & Zell, 2012).

Additionally, social dependency is a cognitive style characterized by excessive concern with maintaining positive social relationships. Socially dependent individuals fear criticism, avoid rejection, and are particularly sensitive to interpersonal disharmony and conflict, which may cause concern and self-esteem damage (Yang & Girgus, 2019). Indeed, socially dependent individuals experience more distress when outperforming others (Exline & Zell, 2012).

3.3.2 Cultural Level At the cultural level, culture influences how individuals interpret themselves and others and may moderate the effects of being envied on self-cognition and self-experience. Individualistic cultures lead individuals to focus more on the self and seek independence from others, thus relating more closely to agency. Collectivistic cultures lead individuals to focus more on others and seek interdependence, thus relating more closely to communion (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Wojciszke, 1997). Indeed, agency's effect on self-esteem strengthens with higher cultural-level agency, while communion's effect strengthens with higher cultural-level communion (Gebauer et al., 2013). Individuals in individualistic cultures experience more pride, confidence, and self-affirmation from being envied, whereas those in collectivistic cultures fear envy from others, worry about hostility, and anticipate negative reactions (Rodríguez Mosquera et al., 2010).

In summary, men, younger individuals, narcissists, and those in individualistic cultures are more likely to engage in self-cognition about being envied from the actor perspective, experiencing stronger enhancement of agentic self-concept and positive self-experience. In contrast, women, older individuals, socially dependent persons, and those in collectivistic cultures are more likely to engage in self-cognition from the observer perspective, experiencing stronger weakening of communal self-concept and negative self-experience.

3.4 The Relationship Between Agency and Communion in Being Envied

Agency and communion are goals individuals desire to achieve simultaneously; they want both to “get ahead” and to “get along.” On one hand, achieving one goal may hinder the other. For example, female leaders face both agentic demands of leadership identity and communal demands of female identity (Koenig et al., 2011). Focusing more on the former may be perceived as less warm or friendly, hindering communal goals, while focusing more on the latter may be perceived as less effective in leadership, hindering agentic goals (Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007). Strong conflict between agency and communion also

generates negative feelings such as stress, anxiety, and tension in female leaders (Putnam et al., 2016). On the other hand, agency and communion may be positively correlated (Roche et al., 2013), with individuals who achieve agentic goals also perceived as achieving communal goals (Kark et al., 2012).

Integrating the conflict and association between agency and communion, Imhoff & Koch (2017) note that when agency is below average, agency and communion are positively correlated; when agency is above average, they are negatively correlated. Based on this, recent research suggests that individuals should cultivate a paradox mindset to alleviate identity conflict and enhance resilience and leadership effectiveness (Zheng et al., 2018). A paradox mindset acknowledges and accepts the existence of contradictions, viewing them as complementary or mutually enhancing (Miron-Spektor et al., 2011; Smith & Lewis, 2011). By developing a paradox mindset, individuals are more likely to view contradictions as opportunities rather than threats, enabling them to derive energy and resources from them, explore connections between contradictory elements more broadly, and integrate solutions from both sides, ultimately improving performance and driving innovation (Lewis, 2000; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018).

Given that being envied signifies achievement of agentic goals while communal goals are hindered, envied individuals who desire both goals simultaneously experience both agentic and communal effects. The conflict perspective between agency and communion establishes a competitive relationship between the two pathways of being envied. What kind of self-experience envied individuals tend to have and what self-regulation they engage in depends on the boundary conditions discussed earlier. For example, an envied individual in a highly individualistic culture is more likely to experience confident self-experience (Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2010) and continue self-enhancement as self-regulation, indicating a stronger agentic pathway effect. In contrast, a highly socially dependent envied individual is more likely to experience distress (Exline & Zell, 2012) and exhibit helping behavior as self-regulation, indicating a stronger communal pathway effect. However, this competitive relationship forces a choice between “getting ahead” and “getting along,” placing envied individuals in a dilemma. Even when envied individuals prefer one choice under certain conditions, negative effects on their mental health and work attitudes remain inevitable (Scott et al., 2015). Therefore, beyond theoretically examining boundary conditions, envied individuals themselves must cultivate a paradox mindset to explore the coexistence and synergy of agency and communion, addressing the dilemma and mitigating negative effects. By activating a paradox mindset, envied individuals can recognize the interaction and mutual reinforcement of agency and communion, viewing being envied as an opportunity to achieve both “getting ahead” and “getting along,” and broadly explore integrated solutions. For example, sharing knowledge and skills with others can both demonstrate success and provide resources for others, building good interpersonal relationships (Grant, 2014; Miron-Spektor et al., 2018).

4. Discussion and Future Research Directions

Our review and integration hold both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, this paper integrates the comprehensive effects of being envied on individuals' positive and negative self-experiences and self-regulation based on the dual perspective model of agency and communion, identifies boundary conditions that strengthen or weaken these effects, and depicts the paradoxical reactions to being envied within a unified framework. Practically, this paper provides valuable guidance for organizations to intervene in envy toward star employees. Organizations expect star employees to create exceptional value and make outstanding contributions (Kehoe et al., 2018). However, if envied star employees engage in self-cognition from the observer perspective, their communal self-concept will be weakened, generating negative self-experience and self-regulation that may negatively impact the organization. Therefore, organizations can intervene through recruitment and selection, employee relationship management, organizational climate creation, and other measures to help envied star employees engage more in self-cognition from the actor perspective, strengthening agentic self-concept and generating positive self-experience and self-regulation that drive organizational development. Additionally, since agency and communion are goals individuals desire to achieve simultaneously, even when envied star employees prefer one choice under certain conditions, negative effects on their mental health and work attitudes remain inevitable (Scott et al., 2015). Therefore, star employees need to cultivate a paradox mindset to view the paradoxical effects of being envied from a relational perspective and mitigate its negative impacts. Organizations can also activate star employees' paradox mindset through various means (Miron-Spektor et al., 2011) to motivate positive performance and avoid interpersonal conflicts that hinder organizational development.

By reviewing the paradoxical experiences and behavioral consequences of being envied and integrating different effects and boundary conditions based on the dual perspective model and its extensions, this paper conceptualizes being envied as a complex event containing both agentic and communal meanings. Individuals' self-cognition about being envied from actor and observer perspectives differentially affects agentic and communal self-concept, triggering positive and negative self-experiences and subsequent self-regulation. This process is moderated by a series of agency- and communion-related factors. Although this paper provides a unified integration of paradoxical reactions to being envied, many questions remain worthy of exploration.

4.1 Studying the Comprehensive Effects of Being Envied Based on the Dual Perspective Model

Future research can deepen the comprehensive effects of being envied under the dual perspective model. First, empirically test the effectiveness of agentic and communal self-concept as a mechanism linking being envied to self-experience and self-regulation. Although we have theoretically argued for this possibility,

direct empirical evidence remains lacking. Recently, scholars have increasingly applied the dual perspective model to study interpersonal interactions and outcomes in organizations, such as leaders' and coworkers' cognition and consequences of employee voice behavior (Weiss & Morrison, 2019; Wu et al., 2022) and subordinates' attitudes and behavioral reactions to leadership behavior (Zapata & Hayes-Jones, 2019). Future research can build on this by applying the dual perspective model and its extensions to study the consequences of being envied.

Second, expand the boundary conditions of being envied's consequences. Although we have provided some 梳理, recent management research on being envied remains limited regarding boundary conditions of its consequences (Lee et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2020; Mao et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2021; Treadway et al., 2019), particularly at interpersonal and organizational levels. At the individual level, agency and communion values may affect the perspective from which individuals engage in self-cognition about being envied, as they reflect individuals' relative preferences for agentic versus communal goals (Locke, 2000). At the interpersonal level, friendship and leader bottom-line mentality may affect the self-cognition perspective. Friendship is an informal relationship based on emotional trust; friends care about each other's interests and concerns and are motivated to maintain friendship through intimacy and commitment, whereas non-friends are less sensitive to relationship damage and more concerned with their own interests (Lee & Duffy, 2019). Leader bottom-line mentality reflects leaders' intrinsic motivation to pursue bottom-line achievements at the expense of other matters, which may foster a competitive, zero-sum-like environment (Lin et al., 2022), activating employees' bottom-line mentality and making them focus only on achieving their own goals and success while ignoring others' needs and sacrificing others' interests (Eissa et al., 2019). At the organizational level, competitive climate and interdependence may also affect the self-cognition perspective. Competitive climate reflects group competition for tangible or intangible rewards too scarce to be equally available to all (Brown et al., 1998). Individuals in competitive climates must outperform others to obtain rewards, thus having motivation to perform better than others and tend to protect their own interests (Zhu et al., 2018). Interdependence reflects the extent to which group members depend on each other to complete tasks, obtain valuable rewards, and achieve work goals. High interdependence highlights collective responsibility, increases the need for cooperation and mutual adaptation among team members, and enhances individuals' empathy and care for others (Puranik et al., 2019).

In summary, agentic values, low-quality friendships, leaders with high bottom-line mentality, and competitive climates may lead individuals to engage in self-cognition about being envied more from the actor perspective, strengthening agentic self-concept and generating positive self-experience and subsequent self-regulation. In contrast, communal values, high-quality friendships, leaders with low bottom-line mentality, and interdependence may lead individuals to engage in self-cognition more from the observer perspective, weakening communal self-concept and generating negative self-experience and subsequent self-regulation.

Future research can empirically test these potential effects.

4.2 Enriching, Comparing, and Summarizing Self-Experience and Self-Regulation When Being Envied

First, existing research primarily focuses on the interpersonal threat of being envied, emphasizing that envied individuals fall into fear and anxiety and carefully repair relationships with enviers (Scott et al., 2015; van de Ven et al., 2010). Although some literature calls for more research on the positive aspects of being envied (Exline & Zell, 2012; Parrott, 2017), positive self-experience and subsequent self-regulation remain largely unexplored. Future research can enrich this area from a self-perspective. For example, as an evaluative component of self-concept (Rosenberg, 1965), self-esteem changes dynamically with self-concept. Enhanced agentic self-concept increases self-esteem (Baryła & Wojciszke, 2019), particularly performance self-esteem—reflecting beliefs about competence in school and work (Hauke & Abele, 2020a). Weakened communal self-concept decreases self-esteem, particularly relational self-esteem—reflecting beliefs about maintaining harmonious relationships with important others such as family and friends (Hauke & Abele, 2020a). Additionally, self-efficacy—individuals’ beliefs about their ability to execute behaviors or achieve standards—is closely related to self-esteem (Bandura, 1977). Future research can incorporate self-esteem and self-efficacy into the effects of being envied on self-experience. Regarding self-regulation, research finds that independent self-construal promotes creative process engagement, stimulating radical innovation, whereas interdependent self-construal promotes seeking creative help from leaders and colleagues, stimulating incremental innovation (Liu et al., 2022). Advice-seeking may also be a strategy envied individuals use to alleviate relationship threats and psychological discomfort (Tai et al., 2022). Therefore, given the close connection between independent/interdependent self-construal and agency/communion (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014), future research can examine the effects of being envied on creative process engagement and advice-seeking.

Second, the same self-regulation may be driven by different self-experiences and motivations. Existing research finds that envied individuals attempt to alleviate others’ hostility and envy through helping, ingratiation, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Scott et al., 2015; van de Ven et al., 2010), driven by negative self-experience and the motivation to get along. However, similar prosocial behaviors, such as knowledge sharing, may also be driven by positive self-experience and the motivation to get ahead (Watkins et al., 2023). Therefore, future research can empirically test whether self-regulation when being envied also exhibits such effects for extension and comparison.

Finally, the same self-experience may lead to different self-regulation. Existing research has found that in response to negative self-experience triggered by being envied, individuals may either repair damaged relationships through helping (van de Ven et al., 2010), ingratiation, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Scott et al., 2015) or reduce organizational citizenship behaviors to minimize

contact and protect themselves (Ye et al., 2021). They may also respond and retaliate by reducing knowledge sharing (Xu et al., 2021), engaging in knowledge hiding (Liu et al., 2020), or even exhibiting incivility toward colleagues (Mao et al., 2021). Beyond our classification based on the dual perspective model, the multimotive model (Smart Richman & Leary, 2009) also explains this: rejection-related experiences evoke different motives, including relationship promotion, antisocial behavior, and withdrawal, leading to different behavioral reactions. Note that reducing organizational citizenship behaviors and knowledge sharing may be distal outcomes of “avoidance”; future research can explore whether being envied triggers more direct avoidance behaviors, such as distancing from envious or minimizing interactions with them (Ferris et al., 2016). Additionally, for envied individuals with positive self-experience, they may exhibit prosocial behaviors like knowledge sharing driven by the motivation to get ahead (Watkins et al., 2023) or antisocial behaviors like self-interest and controlling others driven by the motivation to maintain superiority (Lee et al., 2021; Maner & Mead, 2010; Mead & Maner, 2012). Therefore, future research can combine relevant theories to classify and summarize these findings while conducting broad explorations.

4.3 Determining the Actual Effectiveness of Coping Strategies for Being Envied

Research on coping strategies for being envied has yielded rich findings, including weakening strategies such as hiding success (Exline et al., 2004), modesty, and reducing performance (Henagan & Bedeian, 2009); appeasement strategies such as helping (van de Ven et al., 2010), ingratiation, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Scott et al., 2015); avoidance strategies such as reducing organizational citizenship behaviors (Ye et al., 2021); intensification strategies such as boasting and showing off (Parrott & Rodriguez Mosquera, 2008; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2010); and retaliation strategies such as reducing knowledge sharing (Xu et al., 2021), knowledge hiding (Liu et al., 2020), and incivility (Mao et al., 2021). However, the effectiveness of these strategies is limited to theoretical deduction; research has scarcely addressed whether they actually work after implementation and whether their effects align with original motivations. Existing research has found that some strategies for placating others may produce counterproductive effects opposite to expectations. For example, providing help conveys “you need this” to underperformers (Zell & Exline, 2014). If help draws recipients’ attention to workplace stress, threatens self-concept, or appears unnecessary, it can increase recipients’ emotional exhaustion and physical symptoms (Beehr et al., 2010), leading to negative performance and relationship evaluations of helpers (Harari et al., 2022) and even intensifying envy and social undermining toward helpers (Tai et al., 2023). Additionally, hiding success from others leads them to perceive paternalistic motives, which they may interpret as insulting, reducing trust, cooperation, and relationship investment in the hider (Roberts et al., 2021). Therefore, future research can adopt time-lagged designs with longer time spans (Wu et al., 2021) to test whether coping strategies for being envied actually achieve their intended effects and

identify boundary conditions affecting their effectiveness.

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