



The Interplay of Envy, Mood Disorders and Subjective Happiness in Young Adults: An Exploratory Study

Evan B*

Department of Psychology, Bangalore University, India

*Corresponding author: Evan Bose, #8, Abinash Sarani, Chandmari Danga, P.O + DIST: Bankura-722101, West Bengal, India;
Email: evanbose14@gmail.com

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Abstract

Envy, subjective happiness, and mood disorders are intricately connected, influencing individuals' overall mental health and well-being. Understanding how these elements interact can provide insights into the underlying mechanisms of emotional distress. Keeping above points in view, we made an attempt to study the foresaid. The aims of the study are to explore these relationships, particularly focusing on young adults, and the age range of 18-25 years, to inform more effective therapeutic interventions. It examines benign and malicious envy, as measured by the Benign and Malicious Envy Scale, subjective happiness, assessed by the Subjective Happiness Scale, and mood disorders, evaluated using the Mood Disorders Questionnaire. It is hypothesized that higher levels of benign envy will be positively associated with subjective happiness, while higher levels of malicious envy will be negatively associated with both subjective happiness and mood disorder. Data analysis will include t-test, correlation and regression techniques to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between the variables under study. A sample of 126 participants was selected for the study. In young adults, significant gender differences were observed in subjective happiness, with females reporting higher levels. No significant gender differences were found in benign envy, malicious envy, or mood disorders. Benign envy correlated weakly negatively with subjective happiness, while malicious envy correlated moderately negatively.

Keywords: Subjective Happiness; Benign Envy; Malicious Envy; Mood Disorders; Young Adults

Abbreviations

BeMaS: Benign and Malicious Envy Scale; SHS: Subjective Happiness Scale; MDQ: Mood Disorder Questionnaire.

Introduction

The 21st Century world has recognized an upsurge towards many significant social changes, global interactions and technological advancements, multiplying and interacting to constantly change our inside and outwardly field of view.

Mental health plays a significant role in governing our own self towards the innumerable fields of interest challenging continuously. Reports from WHO (2023) also states that half of all mental health disorders in adulthood start by age 14, the early stages of puberty, initiating a relatively permanent change in their mental health, which often go undetected and untreated. It was also notable that depression and anxiety has been among the leading causes of illness, disability and death among adolescents.

Adolescence and early adulthood are periods characterized

by the transition into greater responsibilities, often accompanied by a pushback against these new demands. Research has consistently highlighted the need for a better understanding of mental health in young adults (18-25). The mental statures as well as the thinking patterns, perceptual abilities, various mental health attributes had changed since the recent advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of them was observed from the literature study of 15 research papers by Cielo F et al. [1]. The articles reviewed indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown measures significantly impacted young adults, leading to a range of mental health issues such as anxiety, stress, depression, event-specific distress, decreased psychological well-being, and altered sleep patterns.

Envy, defined as a complex emotion involving feelings of inferiority, resentment, and longing triggered by the perceived success or advantages of others, is increasingly recognized for its significant impact on subjective well-being and mental health [2]. Particularly prevalent in the era of social media, where curated images of success and happiness abound, envy has been linked to heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and overall dissatisfaction [3]. Conversely, subjective happiness emerges as a pertinent area of study, particularly in the context of resilience and coping mechanisms. Amidst the stressors of academic performance, financial instability, and societal expectations, subjective happiness serves as a potential buffer against the deleterious effects of stress and anxiety. Research suggests that subjective happiness is linked to better resilience and adaptive capacities in the face of adversity [4]. This is further supported by the conceptualization of subjective well-being as a dynamic system that regulates the perception of threats and adversity [5]. Shmotkin D [6] also presents a model of subjective well-being as an active agent of adaptation, particularly in old age. Jones L, et al. [7] advocated for the measurement of "subjective resilience" at the household level, emphasizing the importance of individuals' own perceptions of their resilience. These studies collectively highlight the role of subjective happiness in promoting resilience and adaptive capacities, particularly in the context of urban living and old age.

There exists a link between mood disorders, also called as bipolar spectrum psychopathology and various negative outcomes, including impaired functioning, and substance use disorders [8,9]. This is particularly relevant in young adults, where early identification and intervention can be crucial. The use of the Hypomanic Personality Scale (HPS) has been found to be a useful tool in identifying individuals at risk for bipolar spectrum disorders [9]. Research suggests that bipolar spectrum disorders are prevalent in young adults, with a high incidence in late adolescence and emerging adulthood [10]. These disorders are characterized

by episodic illness, particularly depressive and mixed symptoms, and rapid mood changes [11]. Affective lability, anxiety/depression, and mania are important predictors of new-onset bipolar spectrum disorders in at-risk youths [12]. A youth-led adaptation of a self-stigma reduction intervention for young adults with bipolar spectrum disorders has been developed, known as Narrative Enhancement and Cognitive Therapy [13].

However, the specific relationship between envy, subjective happiness, and bipolar spectrum psychopathology in young adults has not been directly addressed in these studies. Thus, to challenge the limitations and the blockades in the early research works, this serves as an attempt to explore the intricate relationships as well as aims to further investigate and add to the existing bodies of research and understanding.

Review of Literature

A review of literature on envy, mood disorders, and subjective happiness reveals the complex interplay between these factors. Social network sites can provoke envy, leading to negative effects on subjective well-being [14]. Workplace envy, a specific form of envy, is a growing area of interest, with a focus on its antecedents and outcomes [15]. The role of envy in the link between Facebook use and reduced affective well-being is also highlighted [16]. Envy is a complex emotion arising from social comparison, characterized by feelings of inferiority, hostility, and resentment when one perceives another enjoying a desired attribute [17,18]. It originates from the Latin "invidere," meaning to "gaze maliciously" [19]. While traditionally viewed negatively, recent research suggests envy can have both destructive and emulative dimensions [18]. The emotion is often accompanied by other negative feelings such as hostility and rejection, making it difficult to identify or admit. Despite being considered a "second class" emotion, evolutionary psychology has begun to shed light on its potential adaptive functions [19]. There is ongoing debate regarding envy's definition and whether it should be approached as a unitary or dual concept [20]. From the point of view of Psychology, envy is a complex and multifaceted emotion that can have both positive and negative effects. One study by Milovic A, et al. [21] explores the potential of envy as a motivating tool, particularly in the context of sales competitions, but emphasizes the need for careful implementation to avoid negative consequences. Researches by Milic A [19], Smith RH, et al. [17] both highlight the unpleasant and painful nature of envy, characterized by feelings of inferiority, hostility, and resentment.

However, Ven N, et al. [22] distinguishes between benign and malicious envy. This distinction is important in understanding the different ways in which envy can manifest. Research on benign envy has revealed its distinct motivational dynamics

and behavioral consequences, as well as its unique connection to hope for success and fear of failure [23]. This type of envy has been found to motivate self-improvement, particularly in the context of attainable goals [24]. Research has shown that benign envy can have positive effects. Ma L, et al. [25] found that benign envy was associated with higher self-esteem and perceived social support, leading to increased positive affect and life satisfaction. Sawada M, et al. [26] found that individuals with higher levels of benign envy set higher goals and achieved better academic performance. Kwon M, et al. [27] further demonstrated that benign envy can lead to risk-taking and self-improvement. This is in contrast to malicious envy, which is associated with negative outcomes. However, Toomey N, et al. [28] found that while dispositional benign envy can have a direct effect on learning outcomes, state benign envy did not pass the manipulation check in their study. This suggests that the effects of benign envy may vary depending on the context.

While benign envy motivates self-improvement, malicious envy is characterized by the desire to harm or pull down the envied person [22,29]. This distinction has been observed across cultures, including those with separate words for each type and those with a single word for both [22]. This form of envy, as opposed to benign envy, has been found to lead to increased perceived injustice, negative emotions, and counterproductive behaviours in the workplace [30]. However, mindfulness and psychological resilience can help inhibit malicious envy [31]. Malicious envy has also been linked to cyberbullying and organizational politics, which in turn can affect job satisfaction [32]. Childhood emotional maltreatment has been found to negatively predict benign envy and positively predict malicious envy, with psychological resilience playing a moderating role in these associations [33]. This type of envy, in turn, has been linked to increased levels of depression and anxiety. Emotional intelligence has been identified as a key factor in mediating the relationship between childhood maltreatment and both benign and malicious envy [34].

Research has also shown that adolescents and young adults experience both malicious and benign envy, with different worldviews and beliefs influencing the intensity of these emotions [35]. Dispositional envy, particularly benign envy, has been linked to lower life satisfaction, with self-esteem and social connectedness mediating this relationship [36]. Summing up, it can be said that benign envy leads to a motivation to improve oneself, while malicious envy leads to a motivation to harm the envied person [22]. Both forms of envy have been linked to the Dark Triad of personality, with benign envy associated with Machiavellian behaviors and malicious envy associated with both Machiavellian and psychopathic behaviors [37]. However, the distinction between benign and malicious envy has been challenged,

with some researchers arguing that it confounds envy with its outcomes and impairs the understanding of envy [38].

Subjective happiness, as a multifaceted concept, encompasses positive and negative feelings, life satisfaction, and global evaluations of life [39]. It is a personal value that can vary in intensity and duration [40]. While subjective measures of well-being are increasingly being considered in public policy, they are not without their limitations, as they are based on mental states and can overlook distributional concerns and other values [41]. However, these measures can still contribute to human development by providing insights into life satisfaction, domain satisfactions, and well-being [42]. Moreover, a range of factors have been identified as predictors of subjective happiness among young adults. Chaudhary VB [43] found that flourishing, positive experiences, and life satisfaction were significant predictors, while An & Suh (2023) highlighted the role of grateful disposition, social support, and positive interpretation. Singh B, et al. [44] further emphasized the importance of psychological well-being, gratitude, and extraversion. However, Shimai S, et al. [45] noted a U-shaped change in subjective happiness by age, with older adults reporting higher levels of happiness. These findings suggest that a combination of personal, social, and environmental factors contribute to subjective happiness among young adults. Research has shown a complex relationship between envy and subjective happiness. Lemay DJ, et al. [46] found that instrumental goal pursuit may not mediate the relationship between envy and happiness, suggesting that other factors such as life satisfaction and personality differences may play a role. Shamionov RM, et al. [47] further explored this, revealing that the relationship between envy and economic well-being is influenced by satisfaction of material needs. Ma L, et al. [25] added to this by highlighting the impact of benign and malicious envy on subjective well-being, with self-esteem and perceived social support mediating these effects. Lastly, Shamionov RM, et al. [48] found that individuals with a subject position demonstrate lower envy, indicating a potential link between subjective properties and envy. These studies collectively suggest that the relationship between envy and subjective happiness is multifaceted and influenced by various factors.

The bipolar spectrum is a concept that encompasses a range of mood disorders, including bipolar I and II, as well as other conditions such as cyclothymic disorder and major depressive disorder with mixed features [49]. This concept is important for improving the recognition and diagnosis of these disorders, which can often be missed or misdiagnosed [50]. However, there are concerns about the potential over inclusiveness and vagueness of the bipolar spectrum concept, as well as its overlap with borderline personality disorder [51]. This spectrum is associated with disruptions in affect, thoughts, and behaviors, and is often

marked by neurocognitive impairments in executive function and verbal memory [52]. The presence of subthreshold bipolar symptoms may indicate a risk for clinical disorders, and the spectrum is not limited to clinical diagnoses or mood episodes [8]. Comorbidity with ADHD features is also a significant factor, with a notable prevalence of 0.8% in nonclinical young adults [53]. Research has also shown that higher levels of happiness are predictive of recovery from depression, but the presence of affective disorders and higher depression and anxiety symptom severity can predict a subsequent reduction in happiness [54]. Subjective well-being, a key component of happiness, has been found to decrease perceived depression, with this relationship being stronger in older individuals [55]. The subjective experience of irritability, a common symptom of mood disorders, is linked to mood morbidity and behavioral outbursts, with these relationships varying with age [56]. Furthermore, a history of mood disorder can predict unfavorable lifestyle trajectories, while higher lifestyle scores are associated with a reduced risk of first episodes of mood disorder [57]. These findings highlight the bidirectional and multifaceted nature of the relationship between mood disorders and subjective happiness in young adults. It has thus been that envy can have a significant impact on subjective well-being, with benign envy being associated with higher levels of self-esteem and perceived social support, and malicious envy being linked to lower levels of these factors [25]. Envy has also been found to mediate the relationship between passive social networking site usage and depressive symptoms, particularly among individuals with higher levels of life satisfaction [58]. Lastly, young adults who report depression symptoms, drinking to cope, and subjective reactivity have been found to be more sensitive to the negative mood-induced increase in alcohol-seeking behaviour [59].

Previous research has laid a solid foundation by exploring the individual and dyadic relationships among these constructs and they often focus on specific, homogenous populations, limiting the generalizability of their findings. However, while numerous studies have examined envy, subjective happiness, and mood disorders separately, there is a lack of research that integrates these elements to understand their combined impact on mental health. Much of the existing literature does not sufficiently account for the unique socio-cultural and technological contexts that shape the experiences of young adults today. The rapid evolution of social media, changing educational and work environments, and the residual impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are all critical factors that effect on each of the domains. Moreover, the distinction between benign and malicious envy has been explored, but the nuanced ways in which these forms of envy affect subjective happiness and mood disorders, particularly in young adults, are not well understood. Thus, by addressing these gaps, we made an attempt to study envy, subjective

happiness and mood disorders in young adults which is particularly important due to the unique and formative nature of this developmental stage.

Methodology

Aim

To study the relationship between benign envy, malicious envy, subjective happiness and mood disorders and observe gender differences among each.

Objectives

- To compare levels of benign and malicious envy, mood disorders, and subjective happiness between male and female young adults.
- To examine whether there is any relationship between benign envy, malicious envy, subjective happiness and mood disorders.

Hypothesis

- There is a significant negative relationship between malicious envy and subjective happiness in young adults.
- There is a significant positive relationship between benign envy and subjective happiness in young adults.
- There exists a negative relationship between benign envy and mood disorders.
- There exists a positive relationship between malicious envy and mood disorders.
- There exists a negative relationship between subjective happiness and mood disorders.
- There are significant gender differences in levels of benign envy, malicious envy, subjective happiness and mood disorders among young adults.

Research Design

The present study is exploratory in nature.

Variables

Independent Variable: Male and female adults.

Dependent Variable: Benign envy, malicious envy, subjective happiness and mood disorders.

Materials

An information schedule along with the Dispositional Benign and Malicious Envy Scale (BeMaS), consisting of 10 items, developed by Lange J, et al. [23] is to be used to assess the benign and malicious envy in young adults. The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS), developed by Lyubomirsky S, et al. [60], consisting of 4 items will be used to assess the subjective happiness in the young adults. The Mood Disorder Questionnaire (MDQ) by Hirschfeld RM [61] is a 3

item questionnaire used to address the need for accurately screening individuals with a bipolar spectrum is to be used to assess the prevalence of mood disorders in young adults. T-test was used to evaluate the significant difference between males and females. Pearson's correlation was used to find the relationship between each of the variables [62].

Sample

The sampling method used for this study was a combination of random sampling and convenience sampling. The sample comprised of 62 males and 64 females, using 126 participants of ages 18-25 years in Bangalore City. This approach was chosen for its practicality and efficiency in reaching the

target demographic within the given timeframe.

Procedure

Prior to the survey, informed consent was obtained from all participants. This process involved providing detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Consent was confirmed by a check-box in the online survey form, which participants had to tick before proceeding. By employing these measures, the study aimed to ensure reliable and authentic data collection while respecting participant confidentiality and informed consent protocols.

Results and Discussion

	Benign envy	Malicious Envy	Subjective Happiness	Mood disorders
N (total subjects)	126	126	126	126
Mean	4.05	2.85	4.32	1.15
Std. Deviation	1.14	1.22	1.12	0.36
Range	5	5	5.25	1

Table 1: Mean, Standard deviation, and Range for benign envy, malicious envy, subjective happiness and mood disorders among young adults.

Data from 126 participants were included. A good representation of benign envy (Mean = 1.054, SD = 1.14; Range: 5.0), malicious envy (Mean = 2.851, SD = 1.22; Range:

5.0), subjective happiness (Mean = 4.33, SD = 1.13; Range: 5.2) and mood disorders (Mean = 1.15, SD = 0.36; Range: 1) was estimated (Table 1).

S. No.	Gender	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
1	Males	62	4.14	1.2	0.883	0.21
2	Females	64	3.97	1.07		
	Total	N = 126	4.05	1.14		

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation, t-value and p-value for males and females, measuring benign envy in independent sample t-test.

The above Table 2 represents that the mean scores in benign envy measurement are 4.41 and 3.97 in males and females respectively. The t-value with degree of freedom 124, was 0.883, which is not significant at 0.05 level, which indicates that there is no significant gender difference in measuring

benign envy, rejecting our hypothesis. The probable reasons for this rejection could include a lack of sufficient statistical power due to a small sample size, potential variability within gender groups that masks differences, or the possibility that gender does not significantly influence levels of benign envy.

S. No.	Gender	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
1	Males	62	3.04	1.26	1.719	0.704
2	Females	64	2.67	1.16		
	Total	N = 126	2.85	1.22		

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation, t-value and p-value for males and females, measuring malicious envy in independent sample t-test.

The above Table 3 represents that the mean scores in malicious envy measurement are 3.04 and 2.67 in males and females respectively. The t-value with degree of freedom 124, was 1.719, which is not significant at 0.05 level, which indicates that there is no significant gender difference in measuring malicious envy, leading to the rejection of our hypothesis. Possible reasons for this lack of significant

difference could include sample size limitations, variability within each gender group, or the possibility that gender does not substantially influence levels of malicious envy. Additionally, other factors such as cultural, social, or individual differences might play a more prominent role in influencing malicious envy than gender alone.

S. No.	Gender	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
1	Males	62	4.06	1.09	-2.447	0.912
2	Females	64	4.56	1.11		
	Total	N = 126	4.32	1.13		

Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation, t-value and p-value for males and females, measuring subjective happiness in independent sample t-test.

The above Table 4 represents that the mean scores in subjective happiness measurement are 4.06 and 4.56 in males and females respectively. The t-value with degree of freedom 124, was 0.2447, which is significant at 0.05 level, which indicates that there is a significant gender difference in measuring subjective happiness, with females (mean = 4.56) reporting higher subjective happiness than males

(mean = 4.06). This finding may be accepted for several reasons: potential differences in socialization and emotional expression between genders, cultural factors that influence how happiness is perceived and reported, and possible variations in life circumstances and stressors experienced by males and females. These factors could contribute to the observed differences in subjective happiness scores.

S. No.	Gender	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
1	Males	62	1.16	0.37	0.322	0.521
2	Females	64	1.14	0.35		
	Total	N = 126	1.15	0.36		

Table 5: Mean, Standard Deviation, t-value and p-value for males and females, measuring mood disorders in independent sample t-test.

The above Table 5 represents that the mean scores in mood disorders measurement are 1.16 and 1.14 in males and females respectively. The t-value with degree of freedom 124, was 0.322, which is not significant at 0.05 level, which indicates that there is no significant gender difference in measuring mood disorders. The hypothesis that there is a gender difference in mood disorders may have been rejected

due to the small difference in mean scores between males and females, suggesting that gender does not play a significant role in the variation of mood disorder measurements. Additionally, the sample size or the variability within each group might not have been sufficient to detect a significant difference, leading to the non-significant result.

		Benign Envy	Malicious Envy	Subjective Happiness	Mood Disorders
Benign Envy	Pearson Correlation	1	.463**	-.190*	0.07
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0	0.033	0.437
	N	126	126	126	126
Malicious Envy	Pearson Correlation	.463**	1	-.317**	0.034
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0		0	0.709
	N	126	126	126	126

Subjective Happiness	Pearson Correlation	-.190*	-.317**	1	-0.033
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.033	0		0.712
	N	126	126	126	126
Mood Disorders	Pearson Correlation	0.07	0.034	-0.033	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.437	0.709	0.712	
	N	126	126	126	126

Table 6: Pearson's Correlation coefficient values between benign envy, malicious envy, subjective happiness and mood disorders.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

From the above table, it is found that The Pearson correlation coefficient value between benign envy and malicious envy is 0.463, significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This indicates a moderate positive correlation.

The correlation between benign envy and subjective happiness is -0.190, significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). This suggests a weak negative correlation.

The correlation between benign envy and mood disorders is 0.070, which is not significant. This indicates a very weak positive correlation.

The correlation between malicious envy and subjective happiness is -0.317, significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This indicates a moderate negative correlation.

The correlation between malicious envy and mood disorders is 0.034, which is not significant. This indicates a very weak positive correlation.

The correlation between subjective happiness and mood disorders is 0.033, which is not significant. This indicates a very weak positive correlation.

Conclusion

This study aimed to compare levels of benign and malicious envy, mood disorders, and subjective happiness between male and female young adults, and to examine the relationships between these variables. The results showed that there were no significant gender differences in benign envy, malicious envy, or mood disorders, but there was a significant gender difference in subjective happiness, with females reporting higher levels than males. Furthermore, the study found several significant correlations among the variables. A moderate positive correlation between benign envy and malicious envy suggests that individuals experiencing one type of envy are likely to experience the other. Contrary

to the hypothesis, benign envy was weakly negatively correlated with subjective happiness, indicating that higher levels of benign envy are associated with slightly lower subjective happiness. Malicious envy showed a moderate negative correlation with subjective happiness, supporting the hypothesis that higher malicious envy is associated with lower subjective happiness. However, no significant correlations were found between benign envy and mood disorders or between malicious envy and mood disorders, indicating that envy does not have a substantial direct impact on mood disorders. Similarly, subjective happiness and mood disorders showed a very weak, non-significant positive correlation, suggesting that these variables are not strongly related in this sample.

Limitations

Despite the findings, several limitations must be acknowledged.

- The sample size was small.
- The participants were drawn from Bangalore City.
- Lastly, unmeasured variables such as individual coping mechanisms, socioeconomic status, or cultural factors could influence the observed relationships and were not accounted.

Further Suggestions

There can be some efforts which would contribute to more understand the phenomena.

- Future research could address longitudinal studies which can investigate how these variables evolve over time and explore causal relationships.
- Utilizing more diverse samples across different demographics and cultures would enhance the generalizability of findings.
- Employing mixed-method approaches could provide richer insights by complementing quantitative data with qualitative understanding of participants' experiences.

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