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More identified so less envious? On the links between different types of national identity and in-group envy

Oliwia Maciantowicz^{ab*}, Marta Marchlewska^a, Marta Rogoza^a, Zuzanna Molenda

^a, Radosław Rogoza ^{ac} ,and Dominika Witke ^a

^aInstitute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland; ^bFaculty of Psychology, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland; ^c University of Economics and Human Sciences, Warsaw, Poland

*corresponding author, e-mail: omaciantowicz@psych.pan.pl

Biographical notes

Oliwia Maciantowicz, Ph.D., member of the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Warsaw and the Political Cognition Lab at the Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences. Her research interests include narcissism, emotions, and human behavior.

Marta Marchlewska, Ph.D. is the Head of the Political Cognition Lab at the Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences. In her work, she concentrates mainly on the functions that different forms of psychological threat play in the way of perceiving the world of politics.

Marta Rogoza, Ph.D. is currently an assistant professor at the Institute of Psychology of the Polish Academy of Science. Her interests focus on the trait structure of personality, "dark" aspects of personality, national identity, and psychological assessment.

Radosław Rogoza, Ph.D., is a scientist who is especially interested in personality research. Most of his works are devoted to studying the dark side of the personality, with a special place for studying narcissistic personality.

Zuzanna Molenda is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences. Her scientific interests include such areas as emotion regulation, types of in-group identity, and conspiracy beliefs.

Dominika Witke is a final-year Psychology student at the University of Warsaw, specializing in neuropsychology. She is interested in social cognition, the phenomenon of resistance, and the widely understood dynamic of social interrelations.

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Abstract

We investigate relations between benign and malicious in-group envy and the two types of national identity (i.e., secure national identification vs. national narcissism). In two studies (*Ns* = 1000 and 633), we found that secure national identification was negatively linked to malicious envy, while national narcissism was positively related to both malicious and benign envy. In Study 2, we additionally analyzed how in-group envy and two types of national identity shape ingroup altruism. We found that low malicious envy significantly mediated the relationship between secure identification and in-group altruism. We discuss the role of envy in shaping the links between secure (vs. narcissistic) identity and positive intragroup attitudes.

Keywords: narcissistic and secure national identity, benign and malicious in-group envy, altruism

1. Introduction

Once a year, the Finnish government publishes the income of all citizens, which was called "National Jealousy Day" (Whiting, 2018). In such a way, Finland has a specific date for the national, collective, experience of envy towards other Finns. Within the manuscript, we assess whether those who identify with their nation in a secure (vs. defensive) way could be less (vs. more) jealous of their fellow citizens. We attempt to answer this question through the investigation of the relationships between national identity, in-group envy, and concern for the welfare of in-group members (i.e., in-group altruism).

Envy is defined as a social emotion, emerging from upward comparisons with superior others. Upward and downward comparisons can lead to a variety of psychological effects, with many studies in the past showing that downward comparisons, unlike upward ones, positively affect mood or well-being (Suls & Wheeler, 2012). However, over time it has become apparent that upward comparisons may not only have negative consequences, research shows that upward comparisons also have the potential to inspire and can also improve both mood and motivation to achieve more, when success seems attainable (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). The heterogeneity of one's reactions to upward social comparison is mirrored in the two-dimensionality of envy. Envy encompasses two distinct dimensions: benign and malicious, defined as motivational mechanisms. Benign envy is underlined by a desire to succeed and motivates for approaching goals to achieve what an envied person has. Malicious envy is underlined by the fear of failure that motivates hostility and leads to downgrading superior others (Crusius & Lange, 2016). Importantly, the two types of envy have different psychological concomitants. For example, opposite links with schadenfreude (Lange et al., 2018), i.e. that is, the pleasure taken by someone from another person's misfortune is more strongly and positively correlated with malicious envy than with benign one.

Given envy is a feeling that arises when comparing oneself to others (Crusius & Lange, 2016), we argue that the importance of specifying reference groups should be recognized, since social distance can moderate social comparisons (e.g., Mechi & Sanchez-Mazas, 2012). We, therefore, examine how the feelings of envy could be related to the national group, and more specifically, how secure versus defensive national identity could predict these feelings. National identity is one of the most robust predictors of attitudes, feelings, and behaviors both at the ingroup and out-group levels (Cichocka, 2016). Thus, the examination of how in-group envy is related to national identity is an interesting, yet unexplored research area.

Previous research showed that national identity can take different forms (Cichocka, 2016). In this paper, we distinguish between secure national identity (SNI) and defensive one – usually operationalized as national collective narcissism (NCN; e.g., Marchlewska et al., 2022). SNI is described as an unpretentious investment in the in-group, independent of its recognition in the eyes of others, while NCN is defined as a belief in the in-group's greatness with a simultaneous conviction that others do not recognize it sufficiently (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013). While SNI derives from satisfied psychological needs, NCN has its antecedents in the individual's shortcomings and serves a compensatory function (Cichocka, 2016). These two types of national identities also differ in the intra- and intergroup concomitants (Cichocka, 2016). Notably, it seems that whereas SNI benefits the in-group, NCN primarily serves the self and misuses the ingroup for one's purposes (Marchlewska et al., 2020). For instance, past research showed that NCN (but not SNI) was positively linked to willingness to conspire one's own ingroup members (Molenda et al., 2023) or leave the country for personal gains (Marchlewska et al., 2020).

Summing up, SNI, like benign envy, results in positive and constructive attitudes and behaviors, whereas NCN and malicious envy, are frequently linked with hostile attitudes and destructive intents or behaviors. Thus, we suspect that divergent effects of benign and malicious envy will be reflected in the two-dimensionality of national identity and have the potential in modeling one's prosociality. Dispositional concern for others and selflessness are most broadly conceptualized as altruism (Goldberg, 1992). Envy was previously connected with prosociality, which, as has been shown experimentally, may arise as a defense in response to being threatened by another person's enviousness (Van de Ven et al., 2010). Thus, it is worth considering how one's in-group envy disposition may shape in-group altruism.

2. Current Study

In two studies we assess the relations between the two types of national identity, the two types of in-group envy, and in-group altruism. In Study 1, we hypothesized that SNI would positively predict benign envy and negatively malicious one, while NCN would predict malicious envy to a greater extent than benign one. In Study 2, we further examined the role of in-group envy in the national identity-in-group altruism relation. Since envy has a motivational component appearing in social upward comparison, we hypothesize that in-group envy is a significant mediator of the relationship between two types of national identity and in-group altruism. The hypotheses presented within the current manuscript were not pre-registered. All additional materials and data needed to reproduce the results are available on the OSF project site: https://osf.io/avjy4/

3. Method

3.1. Participants and Procedure

Studies were conducted on a nationwide sample of Poles via a computer-assisted online interview conducted by an external research company. The first sample included 1000 participants (549 women; 451 men) with an overall mean age of 47.99 years (SD = 16.49, range

18-85 years old). The second sample involved 633 participants (336 women; 297 men) with an overall mean age of 47.93 years (SD = 16.51, range 18-81 years old).

3.2. Measures

3.2.2. National Identification. In Study 1, we used the three-item measure adapted from the Social Identification Scale (Cameron, 2004; $M_1 = 3.84$, $SD_1 = 0.97$, $\alpha_1 = .91$). In Study 2, we used a full 12-item scale (both ranging from 1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*; $M_2 = 3.47$, $SD_2 = 0.70$, $\alpha_2 = .86$).

3.2.1. National Narcissism. We used the five-item version of the Collective Narcissism Scale (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013) with respect to the national in-group (ranging from 1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*; $M_1 = 2.87$, $SD_1 = 1.08$, $\alpha_1 = .92$, $M_2 = 2.81$ $SD_2 = 1.08$, $\alpha_2 = .89$).

3.2.3. The Benign and Malicious In-group Envy Scale. Based on the Dispositional Benign and Malicious Envy Scale (BeMaS, Lange & Crusius, 2015), we created a scale to measure a propensity to react with two forms of envy (i.e., benign and malicious) towards in-group members (i.e., other Poles). In Study 1 we used 7 items, in Study 2, we used 10 items (ranging from 1=*strongly disagree* to 7=*strongly agree;* In-group Benign Envy: $M_1 = 3.54$, $SD_1 = 1.42$, $\alpha_1 = .73$, $M_2 = 3.98$, $SD_2 = 1.37$, $\alpha_2 = .84$; In-group Malicious Envy: $M_1 = 2.07$, $SD_1 = 1.24$, $\alpha_1 = .90$, $M_2 = 2.19$, $SD_2 = 1.30$, $\alpha_2 = .88$).

3.2.1. In-group Altruism. In Study 2, based on the altruism scale from IPIP-NEO-PI-R (Goldberg, 1992) we created a ten-item scale to measure altruism toward the national in-group (1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*; M_2 = 3.63, SD_2 = 0.68, α_2 = .86).

4. Results and Discussion

Zero-order relations between the study variables are given as supplementary Tables S1 and S2. In Study 1, we tested a simultaneous entry regression models (Table 1) with two forms of

envy as outcome variables and SNI and NCN as predictor variables. Whereas NCN was positively related to both forms of in-group envy, SNI was related positively only to benign ingroup envy, while negatively to malicious in-group envy. Additional analyses showed that the results obtained in Study 1 are independent of individual envy dimensions and individual narcissism (see Tables S3 and S4 in the Supplementary Materials).

In Study 2, we first tested an analogous regression models as in Study 1 by examining how the in-group envy dimensions are predicted by the two forms of national identity (Table 1). SNI was negatively related to malicious in-group envy but unrelated to benign dimension. Simultaneously, NCN was correlated positively with both dimensions of in-group envy. In the next step, we tested a hierarchical regression model (Table 2) with altruism as the outcome variable. In the first step, we included SNI and NCN as predictor variables. The results of this model revealed that whereas SNI was positively related to altruism, the relationship between NCN and altruism was non-significant. In the next model, we also included two forms of ingroup envy as predictor variables. The estimates for both forms of national identity slightly lowered. Benign in-group envy was positively connected with altruism, whereas malicious envy was negatively connected.

Next, in the mediation model¹ (Figure 1), NCN was positively related to both forms of ingroup envy. SNI was negatively associated with malicious in-group envy, however, the relation to benign in-group envy was non-significant. Altruism was predicted by all model variables (positively by SNI and benign in-group envy, and negatively by malicious in-group envy), except for the NCN, which was non-significant. We have found both a significant direct (DE = 0.47; SE

¹Significance was tested with the bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals for the standardized indirect effects (5,000 resamples).

= 0.04; 95% CI [0.40, 0.54]) and indirect effect of SNI on altruism via malicious (IE = 0.12, SE = 0.02, 95% CI [0.08, 0.16] but not via benign in-group envy (IE = 0.01; SE = 0.01; 95% CI [-0.01, 0.02]).

In Study 1 SNI negatively predicted malicious in-group envy and positively benign ingroup envy. In Study 2 we partially replicated these findings and found negative relation between SNI and malicious envy (the link between SNI and benign envy was non-significant). In line with our assumptions, NCN was a significant predictor for both envy dimensions and more robust for malicious in-group envy in both studies. Such results align with Crusius and Lange's (2016) suggestion that benign and malicious envy can differentiate 'prestige-based' SNI (conceptualized by them as patriotism) and 'dominance-based' NCN (linked to nationalism).

The mediation model tested in Study 2 was supported, malicious in-group envy was a significant mediator in the relationship between SNI and in-group altruism. NCN was not a significant predictor of altruism. Thus, high, but defensive, in-group identity does not necessarily directly lead to positive intragroup attitudes. We may conclude that malicious envy has the potential of explaining the variance of the positive relationship between SNI and in-group altruism through lower levels of malicious envy. This result is consistent with the literature linking malicious envy to negative, hostile social behavior and appraisals (Crusius & Lange, 2016; Lange et al., 2018). Thus, co-occurring with SNI, lower levels of malicious envy may then enable selflessness and concern for our in-group members. We were not able to identify the role of benign envy in national identity connection with altruism. The described effects are worth testing experimentally in the future, it is possible that evoking a specific state of in-group envy may shape altruistic behavior toward one's in-group. It is also possible that in-group envy may play a role in explaining not only prosocial behaviors but also antagonistic ones. NCN is commonly associated

with maladaptive tendencies, such as prejudice, conspiracy beliefs and hostility (e.g., Cichocka, 2016; Molenda et al., 2023). Many researchers see those effects as emerging from the threatened ego and serving as a defense mechanism (e.g., Cichocka, 2016; Marchlewska et al., 2022; Molenda et al., 2023); if this is the case in-group envy may be an emotional tendency that can mediate those links. It is worth considering that negative behavioral effects may emerge from malicious not benign envy. To test this assumption further research is needed, experimental or longitudinal data would help to determine if malicious envy is the possible emotional process fueling antagonistic consequences in NCN.

In summary, we were able to mirror dimensions of benign and malicious envy at the ingroup level, along with similar implications for altruism as was previously shown in literature on dispositional individual envy (Lange et al., 2018). Additionally, heterogeneity of in-group envy was reflected in the dichotomy of national identity, SNI is negatively connected with malicious in-group envy, whereas NCN is positively related to both malicious and benign in-group envy. Align with previous studies (e.g., Marchlewska et al., 2020), this research showed that it is rather secure – but not narcissistic – national identity is related to beneficial intragroup processes.

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Table 1

Regression Results for In-group Envy Dimensions

		Study 1						Study 2					
X7 · 11	Benign in-group envy		Malicious in-group envy		Benign in-group envy			Malicious in-group envy					
Variable	В	95% CI	β	В	95% CI	β	В	95% CI	β	В	95% CI	β	
National Identification	0.14	[0.03, 0.26]	.10**	-0.38	[-0.48, -0.29]	31***	0.09	[-0.13, 0.28]	.04	-0.75	[-0.93, -0.57]	40***	
National Narcissism	0.19	[0.08, 0.29]	.14***	0.36	[0.26, 0.45]	.31***	0.22	[0.09, 0.35]	.17***	0.35	[0.25, 0.45]	.29***	
R^2		.04		.10		.04		.13					
F	F	<i>F</i> (2, 997) = 22.63***		<i>F</i> (2, 997) = 52.69***		<i>F</i> (2, 630) = 13.05***		<i>F</i> (2, 630) = 47.94***					

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Note. We report 95% confidence intervals for unstandardized slopes based on bootstrapping with 1,000 resamples. The variance inflation factor (VIF) was satisfying (did not exceed 5) for all analyzed predictors.

Table 2

		Model 1		Model 2			
Variable	В	95% CI	β	В	95% CI	β	
National Identification	0.59	[0.50, 0.68]	.61***	0.47	[0.36, 0.56]	.48***	
National Narcissism	-0.02	[-0.07, 0.04]	03	0.03	[-0.02, 0.08]	.04	
Benign In-group Envy				0.07	[0.03, 0.11]	.14***	
Malicious In-group Envy				-0.16	[-0.20, -0.12]	31***	
R ²		.36			.43		
ç	<i>F</i> (2, 630) = 174.07***			<i>F</i> (4, 628) = 118.76***			
ΔR^2					.07		

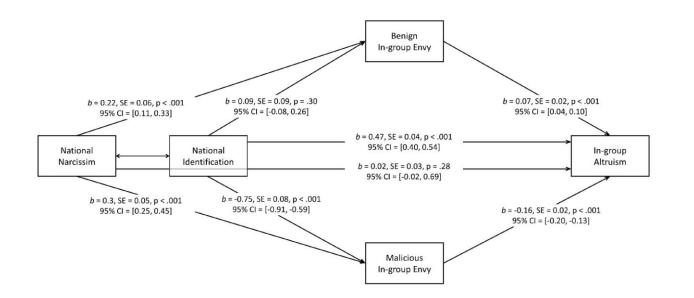
Hierarchical Regression Results for In-group Altruism

p < .05. p < .01. p < .001.

Note. We report 95% confidence intervals for unstandardized slopes based on bootstrapping with 1,000 resamples. The variance inflation factor (VIF) was satisfying (did not exceed 5) for all analyzed predictors.

Figure 1

Mediation Analysis with Envy Dimensions as Mediators



Supplementary Materials

Table 1

Zero-Order Relations from Study 1

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 National identification						
2 National narcissism	.47***	-				
3 Benign in-group envy	.17***	.19***	-			
4 Malicious in-group envy	15***	.17***	.37***	-		
5 Benign individual envy	09**	.15**	.19**	.31**	-	
6 Malicious individual envy	14**	.16**	.23**	.62**	.44**	-
7 Individual Narcissism	.14**	.19**	.31**	.16**	.17**	.31**

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 2

Zero-Order Relations from Study 2

	1	2	3	4	5
1 National identification	-				
2 National narcissism	.49**	-			
3 Benign in-group envy	.13**	.20**	-		
4 Malicious in-group envy	26**	.09*	.30**	-	
5 In-group altruism	.60**	.27**	.12**	39**	-
6 Individual Narcissism	.04	.21**	.31**	.27**	.03

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 3

Study 1: Hierarchical Regression Results for Two Form of In-Group Envy, controlling for Individual Narcissism

	DV:	Benign in-grou	p envy	DV: Malicious in-group envy Model 2				
		Model 1						
Variable	В	95% CI	β	В	95% CI	β		
National identification	0.12	[0.002, 0.24]	.08*	-0.39	[-0.49, -0.30]	30***		
National narcissism	0.13	[0.02, 0.23]	.10**	0.33	[0.24, 0.42]	.28***		
Grandiose narcissism	0.60	[0.46, 0.73]	.28***	0.28	[0.14, 0.41]	.15***		
R^2		.12			.12			
F	1	<i>F</i> (3, 996) = 45.00***			<i>F</i> (3, 996) = 43.82***			
ΔR^2	.08			.02				

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Note. We report 95% confidence intervals based on bootstrapping with 1,000 resamples. Grandiose Narcissism was measured by the 34-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Hall, 1979). The variance inflation factor (VIF) was satisfying (did not exceed 5) for all analyzed predictors.

Table 4

Study 1: Hierarchical Regression Results for Two Form of In-Group Envy, controlling for Individual Benign and Malicious Envy

	DV: I	Benign in-gro	up envy	DV: Malicious in-group envy			
Variable		Model 1		Model 2			
Variable	В	95% CI	β	В	95% CI	β	
National identification	0.20	[0.10; 0.30]	.14***	-0.17	[-0.24;-0.10]	13***	
National narcissism	0.13	[0.04; 0.22]	.10**	0.16	[0.09;0.22]	.14***	
Benign Individual Envy	0.34	[0.23; 0.46]	.18***				
Malicious Individual Envy				0.52	[0.48;0,57]	.58***	
R^2	.08			.40			
F	<i>F</i> (3, 996) = 26.92***			<i>F</i> (3, 996) = 224.34***			
ΔR^2	.03			.31			

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.;

Note. We report 95% confidence intervals based on bootstrapping with 1,000 resamples The variance inflation factor (VIF) was satisfying (did not exceed 5) for all analyzed predictors.

The Benign and Malicious In-group Envy Scale

Polish (original)

Proszę określić swoją zgodę lub niezgodę z każdym stwierdzeniem, używając następującej skali odpowiedzi:

- 1. Chciałbym, aby ci Polacy, którzy są lepsi ode mnie, stracili swoją przewagę.
- 2. Jeśli inni Polacy mają coś, co sam chciałbym mieć, pragnąłbym im to odebrać.
- 3. Mam złą wolę wobec Polaków, którym zazdroszczę.
- 4. Obserwowanie osiągnięć innych Polaków sprawia, że żywię do nich urazę.
- 5. Kiedy zazdroszczę innym Polakom, skupiam się na tym, jak odnieść podobne sukcesy w przyszłości.
- Odczuwana przeze mnie zazdrość wobec innych Polaków, motywuje mnie do realizowania własnych celów.
- 7. Dążę do osiągnięcia wspaniałych rzeczy, których dokonali inni Polacy.
- 8. Jeżeli zauważam, że inni Polacy są lepsi niż ja, próbuję się później poprawić.
- 9. Uczucie zawiści sprawia, że przestaję lubić innych Polaków.
- 10. Jeśli inni Polacy mają bardziej pożądane cechy, większe osiągnięcia lub dobra materialne niż ja, próbuję dojść do tego samego.

Skala odpowiedzi: od 1 = Zdecydowanie się nie zgadzam do 7 = Zdecydowanie się zgadzam

English (translation):

Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement using the following response scale:

- 1. I wish that superior Poles lose their advantage.
- 2. If other Poles have something that I want for myself, I wish to take it away from them.
- 3. I feel ill will towards Poles I envy.
- 4. Seeing other Poles' achievements makes me resent them.
- 5. When I envy other Poles, I focus on how I can become equally successful in the future.

- 6. Envying other Poles motivates me to accomplish my goals.
- 7. I strive to reach other Poles' superior achievements.
- 8. If I notice that other Poles are better than me, I try to improve myself.
- 9. Envious feelings cause me to dislike other Poles.
- If other Poles have superior qualities, achievements, or possessions, I try to attain them for myself.

Response scale: from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*

In-group Altruism

Polish (original)

Prosimy o uważne przeczytanie poniższych zdań, opisujących różne zachowania, uczucia i myśli ludzi. Prosimy o zastanowienie się nad każdym z nich – w jakim stopniu opisuje ono również Pana/Panią? Ludzie są bardzo różni, więc nie ma tu dobrych ani złych odpowiedzi. Za każdym razem proszę szczerze odpowiedzieć na pytanie, w jakim stopniu dane stwierdzenie opisuje Pana/Panią.

- 1. Uwielbiam pomagać innym Polakom.
- 2. Troszczę się o innych Polaków.
- 3. Nie mam czasu na sprawy innych Polaków.
- 4. Sprawiam, że inni Polacy czują się niezręcznie.
- 5. Dla każdego Polaka mam dobre słowo.
- 6. Nie obchodzi mnie dobro innych Polaków.
- 7. Uczucia innych Polaków nie robią na mnie wrażenia.
- 8. Patrzę obojętnie na innych Polaków.
- 9. Odgaduję, czego potrzebują inni Polacy.
- 10. Sprawiam, że inni Polacy czują się mile widziani.

Skala odpowiedzi: od 1 = Nie opisuje mnie w ogóle do 5 = Opisuje mnie bardzo dobrze

English (translation):

Please read carefully the following sentences, which describe different behaviors, feelings and thoughts of people. Please think about each one - to what extent does it also describe you? People are very different, so there are no good or bad responses here. Each time, please honestly answer the question to what extent the given statement describes you.

- 1. I love helping other Poles.
- 2. I care about other Poles.
- 3. I don't have time for other Poles' affairs.

- 4. I make other Poles feel uncomfortable.
- 5. I have a good word for every Pole.
- 6. I don't care about the welfare of other Poles.
- 7. Other Poles' feelings don't affect me.
- 8. I look indifferently at other Poles.
- 9. I anticipate the needs of other Poles.
- 10. I make other Poles feel welcome.

Response scale: from 1 = *Doesn't describe me at all* to 5 = *Describes me very well*

References

Raskin, R. N., & Hall, C. S. (1979). A narcissistic personality inventory. *Psychological Reports*, 45(2), 590. https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1979.45.2.590