



**HAL**  
open science

## Envy, Schadenfreude and evaluation: understanding the strange growing of individual performance appraisal

Bénédicte Vidaillet

### ► To cite this version:

Bénédicte Vidaillet. Envy, Schadenfreude and evaluation: understanding the strange growing of individual performance appraisal. Richard H. Smith, Ugo Merlone, Michelle K. Duffy. Envy at work and in organizations, Oxford University Press, pp.191-209, 2016. hal-01366994

**HAL Id: hal-01366994**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01366994>**

Submitted on 15 Sep 2016

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## Envy, Schadenfreude, and Evaluation

### Understanding the Strange Growing of Individual Performance Appraisal

Bénédicte Vidaillet

#### Introduction

Some studies on workplace envy have explored the consequences of specific managerial and organizational practices, tools, and systems on the development of this emotion (Duffy, Shaw, & Schaubroeck, 2008; Nickerson & Zenger, 2008; Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004). In particular, some researchers have looked at the effects of contemporary systems of performance evaluation (Stein, 2000; Vidaillet, 2008a) based on the definition of key performance indicators, the formulation of individual objectives, performance measurement, “rewards” or “sanctions,” generally accompanied by a staged comparison of employees that often leads to a ranking in which everyone is assigned a position. In such a performance appraisal system, the evaluation process is no longer just an aspect of the profession but the pivotal element supposed to structure certain aspects that, until now, were relatively independent of it: The relationship between a working individual and his/her activity on one hand (i.e., the very definition of the activity, the conception of the tasks, the organization of labor), and the institution s/he works for, on the other (i.e., what one gains from one’s occupation—recognition, remuneration, etc.—in return for what one contributes) become here entirely dependent on evaluation. Conventional thought about individual performance appraisal has addressed it as a process intended to

provide a rational basis for managerial decision-making about people—for instance, to determine whether employees require further training and exposure; or whether they qualify for additional pay, promotion, or some other related benefit. However, it has also been shown how harmful these practices could be to organizations, by reinforcing envy among team workers (Vidaillet, 2008a) and, as a consequence, by preventing workers from functioning collectively, by generating tension and conflicts (Stein, 2000), and by preventing bonding.

The Development of Envy Is Not the Only Problem Resulting from This Type of System.

First, in spite of the widespread practice of performance appraisal, its effectiveness is frequently questioned (Taylor et al., 1995): Conflicting purposes often undermine attempts at evaluation, and the flaws of the procedures used—including the use of vague qualities, irrelevant measurement criteria, superficial checklists, lack of rater training, low levels of supervisory motivation—lead to unfair evaluations (Baron & Kreps, 1999; Nurse, 2005; Rice, 1996). More importantly, “behind a mask of objectivity and rationality, executives [may] engage in much manipulation in an intentional and systematic manner” (Longnecker et al., 1996, p. 183) because “the formal appraisal process is indeed a political process, and . . . few ratings are determined without some political consideration.” Hence, managerial discretion and effectiveness, not accuracy, may be the primary concern of the practicing executive in appraising subordinates. In this approach, organizations are arenas in which negotiations, networking, and the development of political strategies play an important role in determining who gets what, and within what context. What matters might very well “turn out to be not . . . how well one performs, but whom one knows” (Nurse, 2005, p. 1179). The strategies aiming at

influencing the judgement of one's manager can be extremely diverse: self-staging, flattery, self-promotion, over-zealousness, or information manipulation (Gardner & Martinko, 1988; Prendergast, 1993).

Second, these evaluation methods, like any management tool, can negatively affect workers' behavior and undermine their performance (Adler & Harzing, 2008; Anderson et al., 1993; Courty & Marschke, 1997). Thus, economist Maya Beauvallet (2009) compiled an inventory of the research studies showing the absurdity of many performance evaluation and incentive systems. For example, finding that a certain type of patient died regularly on the operating table, a hospital fixed a maximum quota of "losses" per surgeon; as a result of this, none of the surgeons was willing to operate on this type of patient when that fatal quota was almost reached. In the United States, a research study in the field of educational sciences (Linn, 2000) examined the States in which there existed a system whereby teachers and schools were remunerated or penalized according to the performance of their students on their tests. It appeared that in those schools, the teachers focused on teaching their students how to correctly answer the questions in the tests, rather than on teaching them fundamental knowledge and skills.

Third, although the advocates of such evaluation methods insist on their "fairness," Castilla and Benard (Castilla, 2008; Castilla & Benard, 2010) show that the opposite is often true: When an organizational culture promotes meritocracy (compared with when it does not), managers in that organization may ironically show greater bias in favor of men over equally performing women in translating employee performance evaluations into rewards and other key career outcomes. They call this the "paradox of meritocracy": "an organizational culture that prides itself on meritocracy may encourage

bias by convincing managers that they themselves are unbiased, which in turn may discourage them from closely examining their own behaviors for signs of prejudice” (Castilla & Benard, 2010, p. 567).

Fourth, researchers in the field of work psychology have shown that individual performance evaluation practices and the associated series of indicators, means of standardization, contractualization, and individualization have contributed to the deterioration of people’s health at work (Clot, 2010; Dejours, 2006; Dujarier, 2006): by intensifying work, by constantly raising production targets and tracking and eliminating “downtimes,” which were actually periods of physical rest, of information exchange or knowledge sharing between colleagues; by reinforcing one’s impression of coping alone with the increasingly testing physical and mental demands of work; and finally, by generating the discouraging feeling, among employees, of not being able to “do one’s work well” because the targets to be reached are more and more constrained, standardized, and monitored.

Finally, if one looks at the situation from Foucault’s perspective, one can denounce these evaluation systems as a particularly disturbing form of the “liberal art of governing” (Foucault, 2004):

We have engaged in a society in which the power of law is not diminishing but is being integrated into a far more general type of power: that of normalization. Which implies a completely different supervision and control mechanism. Permanent visibility and classification of individuals, hierarchisation, qualification, the establishment of limits, diagnosis. (Foucault, 1994, p. 77)

Under the guise of evaluating, the aim is actually to normalize, control, and impose behaviors. In this perspective, evaluation tools pertain to new techniques used in a society in which supervision is generalized (Gori & Del Volgo, 2009).

The number of highlighted issues and criticism should in theory lead to the decline of such evaluation methods. Quite the opposite happens, in fact. A study of the human resources management practices of more than 800 American companies shows that more than 95% used individual performance assessment methods in 2002, versus 45% in 1971 (Dobbin et al., 2008). In France, a recent study of a representative sample of 1,000 staff working in private companies of more than 50 people shows that, in 2010, 73% of the staff were evaluated by such methods (Methis/IFOP, 2011). From a small initial number of American private companies such as General Electric, IBM, Rank Xerox or McDonald's, they have spread across countries to all sorts of organizations: private, public organizations, associations; German, French, Danish. Originally restricted to specific jobs (sales) or specific functions (CEOs of publicly listed companies), they can now apply to everyone, from layman to management.

A key question is therefore to understand why, paradoxically, despite the harmful effects of the evaluation systems and the complaints they generate, most people are favorable to their development. What are their reasons? Why would people support practices that end up affecting them negatively? In this chapter, we will make the case that envy is one trigger that explains the growing demand for individual performance appraisal. Such a statement leads us to look with new eyes into the link between envy and contemporary evaluation systems: Envy is not only a consequence of those systems, but also may be partly at the root of their development.

## A Brief Detour via Lacan

We base our reasoning in this chapter on the conception of envy developed by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. This conception helps analyse very precisely one's double relation to "the other," a relationship that plays a role in envy and is very useful for understanding envy in organizational contexts (Vidaillet, 2007, 2008a, 2008b): according to Lacan, envy puts into play the envious, an almost identical other, which Lacan calls the "little other," and an Other which Lacan calls the Big Other and whose gaze is captured by the little other because the latter is supposed to possess something that the envious lacks and needs in order to capture the Other's gaze and hence exist in His eyes.

Lacan addressed the question of envy by commenting on a statement by Saint Augustine (Confessions, 1, chapter 7): "I have myself observed a baby to be jealous, though it could not speak; it was livid as it watched bitterly another infant at the breast" (Lacan, 1962, session of March 14th p. ?). For Lacan, the child in this scene is not jealous, but envious. He points out that the very young child who is watching his or her infant sibling has been weaned for a long time and does not need the maternal breast any longer. It is the sight of the non-weaned brother that creates envy because this sight reminds the child of his/her own weaning; i.e., of the first severance. It is when he can see that another is usurping his own place in the relationship with the mother that the child apprehends for the first time what he is deprived of and experiences an unbearable loss (Lacan, 1962, session of March 14th). The envious child cannot find the support he needs to be able to separate from his mother, to bear the omnipresent anxiety resulting from his separation from her, and from the fact that he no longer knows what he is in her desire (or in "the Other's desire") (Lacan, 1986, 2004). In the case described by Saint

Augustine, the envious child suffers from understanding for the first time that s/he has been separated from the mother and from losing what s/he was in her desire. This approach emphasizes that envy is deeply related to the gaze and that it is a three-part play (Vidaillet, 2007) involving the envious, the envied, and the third one who gazes at the envied while the envious himself gazes at this gaze. Envy must not be mistaken for jealousy, which also involves a triangle of three people. From a psychoanalytical perspective, jealousy is an emotion that is more “mature” than envy: it requires that the child be already separated from his/her mother for him/her to accept that she has relations of love with other people. Whereas in envy, the child suffers from understanding for the first time that he/she has been separated from the mother.

This approach also insists on the fact that the envious does not envy the other’s possession of the prized object as such, but rather the way the other is able to enjoy this object, which is why it is not enough for him simply to steal and thus gain possession of the object. His true aim is to destroy the other’s ability to enjoy the object. As Lacan-inspired philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2009) underlines,

Envy must be placed within the triad of envy, thrift, and melancholy, the three forms of not being able to enjoy the object. . . . In contrast to the subject of envy, who envies the other’s possession and/or *jouissance* of the object, the miser possesses the object, but cannot enjoy/consume it. . . . As for the melancholic subject, like the miser he possesses the object, but he loses the reason that made him desire it. (p. 77)

Let us now talk about the demand for evaluation: our hypothesis is that the latter is partly motivated by envy. We must therefore closely examine what, in the demand for



evaluation, is at play in one's relation to the little other and to the Big Other, to the gaze, and to enjoyment.

## Envy, Feeling of Injustice, and Undue Enjoyment

What is really remarkable about contemporary evaluation practices is the wish for "transparency." Of course, who would be against transparency? But if one looks a little closer, one realizes that the wish for transparency is not necessarily motivated by a noble sentiment towards others.

What facet of the other is shown to us in contemporary evaluation? Evaluation, such as we know it today, almost always goes hand in hand with open comparison; the results of the evaluation are visible, displayed in the name of transparency. One's relationship to the other is largely simplified here: it is an other that is comparable to oneself, an other whose singularity is eradicated; of this other, one only keeps what can serve as a benchmark for comparison. The aim is to differentiate oneself from this other, using well-defined criteria, thanks to which we can be openly compared, measured; to show that we can "distinguish ourselves from the rest." The aim is not so much to find out what marks we have obtained, as to compare our marks with others; it is less to get gratification for oneself than to find out exactly which gratification the others could obtain. Evaluation, in this sense, is of no interest if its results are kept secret; it is a means of situating oneself in relation to, of comparing oneself to, the other, to watch the other. Why such a desire to watch the other, to know exactly what he does and what he gets? This, according to us, is where envy may come into play.

Envy is strongly related to the supposed enjoyment of the other. What the infant desires is what he/she believes the other possesses: the total and absolute enjoyment of

what he/she is deprived of. The child is all the more frustrated as he/she imagines that the other enjoys all possible satisfactions. This enjoyment cannot be shared: it is not available to the child precisely because the other has “stolen” it from him.

This is in keeping with the hypothesis according to which envy contains resentment (Heider, 1958; Parrott, 1991; Schoeck, 1969; Smith, 1991): the people who feel envy tend to compare themselves unfavorably to other persons and to feel that the envied person is underserving of his or her advantage (Heider, 1958), or, that they, themselves are undeserving of disadvantage (Ben-Ze’ev, 2000). According to van de Ven et al. (2009), perceptions of injustice and unfairness are typically associated with the experience of malicious envy (see also Sterling, van de Ven, & Smith, Chapter 3, this volume). Envious people may also feel that the person they envy has taken away what they deserved for themselves (Schimmel, 2008). The envied advantage is perceived and felt, subjectively, as undeserved. This is very much different from pure cases of resentment proper, which has more “objective” validity (e.g., Smith, 1991; Leach, 2008). In this case, the natural anger resulting from unfair treatment can be expressed more openly, because of its objective quality. In contrast, envious resentment, being more subjective and lacking in consensual legitimacy, cannot be expressed directly.

In the context of work, one is quick to imagine that the other gets more enjoyment than oneself, does less, and gets more. She may fantasize the other as one who enjoys himself more than she, and cannot bear this idea of the other getting more if he doesn’t deserve it. The performance appraisal might very well take away some of this undeserved enjoyment. The aim of appraisal systems is precisely to “lay everything on the table”: to measure accurately and show openly what each one is supposed to contribute and receive,

in sake of a socially acceptable cause—justice and fairness. One can imagine that evaluation will put things straight. Because the subject assumes that the other gets more enjoyment than she herself does, and undeservedly so, the demand for evaluation may hence be considered as a way of controlling the enjoyment of the other and removing his undue enjoyment (or “*surplus jouissance*” in Lacanian terms). She is prepared to be evaluated so that the other can also be; and even if the price to pay for the subject may be high, the other is fantasized as certainly losing more than she. The subject is ready to make a sacrifice if she can deprive the other from some enjoyment. This is in line with findings in experimental economics, which suggest that envy can push individuals to make efforts or to pay to alter others’ position or reduce others’ income, and that an envious mindset will cause people to accept less-than-optimal monetary reward as long as another participant’s advantage is reduced (Zizzo, 2008; see also Celse, Chapter 14, this volume). Ironically, the result is that envy can motivate people to act in way that reduces the absolute level of their possible outcomes. If envy leads them to introduce individual performance appraisal systems, the loss may be high if we consider all the problems described at the beginning of this chapter: loss of autonomy, increased control, inappropriate targets, impossibility to work as a team, loss of motivation, and so on.

In a study of the opinion of workers from several companies about individual performance appraisal systems recently introduced (Vidaillet, 2013), the results show that after first complaining about increased pressure and loss of autonomy, they ended up justifying the new system by stating a specific case: the case of “Mr. Do-Nothing” who spoiled the motivation of all the staff in the department, because he did nothing, was paid like everybody else, and no one said anything. Evaluation was supposed to eliminate the

Do-Nothings by getting them back on the straight and narrow. Or the case of that “Mrs. Goody-Two-Shoes,” who took all the credit, and was always pretending that everything happened thanks to her! Individualized evaluation would for sure put things and the Mrs. Goody-Two-Shoes back in their place.

Our point here is not to suggest that Mr. Do-Nothing and Mrs. Goody-Two-Shoes don't exist, but to highlight that the systematic appearance of these cases, whatever the company and the work context, leads us to believe that it refers to the fantasy of an other imagined to be an “enjoyment robber” (or “*jouissance* robber” in more Lacanian terms) (Žižek, 2009), which is a key mechanism of envy. According to Lacan, fantasy is a narrative structure whose content can vary greatly, which rests on the imaginary promise of recapturing lost enjoyment, but also on a key element: the obstacle that explains the loss of enjoyment (Žižek, 2009). In the cases described above, the obstacle manifests itself in the form of the people accused of taking and receiving more than they should, and hence, of provoking lack of motivation and discouragement among their colleagues. Evaluation thus leaves the impression that such feelings could be overcome as the lost enjoyment could be recaptured.

## Envy and the Secretive Side of Work

This fantasy of an other being an “enjoyment robber” can be supplemented by an element specific to the workplace. Researchers in work psychology have demonstrated something that may seem strange or counterintuitive: In order to do one's work properly, one must also be able to conceal certain things (Clot, 2010; Dejours, 2003; Molinier, 2008).

Indeed, while working consists of filling the gap that constantly occurs between what is prescribed and the reality of the situation, “doing one's work properly” requires, most of

the time, that one break some rule. For instance, it is impossible to comply with all the rules and requirements at the same time; indeed, some rules inevitably contradict others, and one has to choose which one to comply with in such a situation. To some degree, therefore, working implies playing with the rules, which is often necessary in order to be able to work properly. This play sometimes becomes part of the “tricks of the trade,” i.e., used on a regular basis. This behavior, by revealing the contradictions inherent in ordinary work,

makes it perfectly understandable that s/he who has not given up doing her/his work properly, therefore zealously, showing initiative and originality, quickly learns that s/he will have to exercise his/her intelligence away from the eyes of the hierarchy, sometimes of her/his peers or even of her/his subordinates, or s/he will have to ensure their complicity and loyalty, which is not that simple. Being able to exercise intelligence at work requires discretion. (Dejours, 2003, p. 17)

Each individual will have developed her/his own tricks, will have learned to hide these tricks and to keep the secret.

But the secret can become intolerable. Knowing that everything is not exposed can soon lead a subject to fantasize about this secret inherent to the other, to the person one works with or who works in the office or department next door. The other may be suspected to use his secrets, not in order to do his job properly, but on the contrary, to “take advantage of the system,” to misuse it to his advantage, to do less work, to clear off, etc. The problem with this secretive dimension, which is normally part of ordinary work, lies in the fact that it may excite the fantasy that the other uses this gray area to

enjoy more than us. This certainly explains the success of the idea of “transparency” that comes with evaluation: The promise of evaluation is that everything everyone does, what everyone gets up to on the sly, how they take advantage of the system, will be revealed, brought into the open.

Let us also note that envy is associated with a sense of scarcity (Foster, 1972; Lindholm, 2008): what is given to one is necessarily taken away from the other, and there cannot be enough of it for everyone. This is the reason why envy can intensify when resources have to be shared, particularly when they are scarce and/or diminishing. In contemporary evaluation practices, this notion of scarcity and of the necessity to distribute resources thriftily is central. The discourse used to justify the implementation of these practices underlines the necessity to economize and to tighten budgets, reserves, and pools of productivity to be exploited, etc. The overall budget will not increase; it might even be cut; but in any case, those who get good results have nothing to fear, and they will be rewarded according to their merit. This discourse about the growing scarcity of resources may foster envy, which in turn may activate the demand for evaluation: “Put in place individual performance evaluation procedures to ensure that what’s left of the cake is shared fairly! We can no longer afford to waste and to give to those who do not deserve to get.” And therefore “transparency” is highlighted as a way to avoid waste and injustice.

## Stealing the Other’s Tricks

As presented previously, the secretive side of work may encourage the subject to imagine that their colleagues use their secrets to misuse the system to their advantage and get undeserved enjoyment. Another consequence is that the person would really like to

uncover the little secrets, the ropes, the tricks of the trade, which the other has learned. So it's no longer about imagining that the other is better off than oneself; it's about stealing his/her secret so as to benefit from it.

Evaluation often goes hand in hand with showing models and with benchmarking. This involves identifying existing "best practices" in order to implement them and use them as the referent model on the basis of which evaluation will be performed. This generally implies that the following questions are answered: Who are the best employees? What do they do in order to be the best? What in their practices can be used and transmitted to other workers? In an extract of a documentary on work that was very successful in France (Viallet, 2009), a consultant paid by a company (Fenwick) goes with a "top salesman," a "referent," to clients; he observes and then interviews the consultant so that the latter explains the reasons why he has behaved in such and such a manner with the client: The objective then being to teach the other salesmen the practices thus revealed and formalized and to raise the performance level expected from the employees—who are now supposed to have become excellent. Isn't it wonderful to be able to appropriate the know-how of this excellent salesman, to be able to capture this "extra something" he is supposed to possess, that secret which at the moment he alone enjoys? All of a sudden, every salesman can now appropriate, equip himself with the know-how that top salesman has built, more or less tacitly, over years of practice; every employee can now become excellent. Isn't that what one dreams of—Stealing from the other the secret of his success, obtaining the magic ring one dreams of having for oneself? That "extra something" that the other is supposed to possess: that is what is involved in envy (Vidaillet, 2008b): One always believes that the other, the one one

envies, holds the secret of success. And this is what is promised to the employees with evaluation: evaluation procedures are implemented to “help them improve themselves”; everyone will be able to benefit from those good practices, to put them into place, and it is on this basis that they will be evaluated. It is out of the question that only a few workers possess them. So our hypothesis here is that one may ask for evaluation so that one can capture that “extra something” the other is supposed to possess and that makes him better than oneself.

## Envy and Instability of Places

Before contemporary evaluation practices were developed, there were still grading, ranking, or comparison practices, involving evaluation at some stage—for instance, under the form of competitive examinations, which people belonging to well-defined hierarchies underwent in order to move from one category to another. In those cases, comparison and evaluation result in permanent changes in position; they are changes in the symbolic order: they are controlled, there are rites of passage; the conditions of passage are very demanding, and when one moves up a category, one cannot move back down again. These distinctions are often a necessary step to get more distinctions or marks of recognition. And one cannot change categories whenever one wants to; there are specific times for this; and generally these moments are relatively rare: for example, French school children are evaluated—with the baccalaureate examination—on the knowledge they have acquired between their first and final years at school. All this creates symbolic borders and separations. But this isn't fun. We know that one needs time to change categories. We know that if the other is in one place and we are not, it might be difficult to change this hierarchical order. We have to tolerate the difference and the gaps.



## What Do Contemporary Evaluation Practices in Organizations

### Offer Us?

By breaking up time into very short periods, and by organizing, within these periods, competitions in which, supposedly, everything can be replayed, contemporary evaluation practices tend to make work feel like huge, endless gambling matches or like video game sessions that follow one after another indefinitely. They have the characteristic of assigning a highly fluid position, which is—unlike the status that is linked with a position within a career—*not* long-term oriented. No stable expectations of recognition can be deduced from this position, as the performance appraisal and the ranking that generally follows always refer to a certain point in time and are therefore tagged as temporary, short-lived, reversible. The only thing that counts seems to be your results at time  $t$ . An individual may be bad one day, but could become the best the day after if he puts in the necessary effort. Or he might do well today, but this does not mean anything in the future because what he will have achieved before will not be taken into account when he is evaluated.

Hence, when introduced, contemporary evaluation systems can have a radical impact on existing work positions. Sociologist Nicolas Belorgey (2010) uses the case of hospital emergency services: An evaluation system has been introduced, aiming to increase the staff productivity through quantitative and measurable targets, supported by financial rewards. The main performance indicator is the patient's waiting time, which must be reduced as much as possible (ironically, using pre-existing data, Belorgey shows that shorter waiting times statistically increase the chance one will have to come back later). The staff from one hospital are ranked according to this indicator, as are the chief

doctors nationwide. Belorgey reports a meeting of the chief doctors: Professor Dumont, a renowned 50-year-old university professor, who is a high-ranking member of the institution, ends up being lectured for “bad behavior.” He is advised to follow the example of 30-year-old Dr. Dupre, a low-ranking doctor in a small-town hospital, who gets much better results according to this indicator (but whose return rate is also much higher, which is not taken into account in the evaluation method). While traditional ranking systems give us clearly defined positions and define mandatory steps to achieve higher positions, the new evaluation systems can magically lift such constraints, disturb the old order, blur the positions. When young Dr. Dupre should normally have waited years, passed many exams, changed hospitals in order to slowly climb the ladder, he suddenly becomes a star thanks to the new performance evaluation system.

The evaluation system provides a supposedly neutral ranking that suddenly questions the position of the one who was previously enjoying a dominating position and whose fame and skills get challenged. The evaluation systems can apparently trigger the fall of the powerful, whose position previously seemed unquestionable. It can supposedly highlight the true value, expose the truth. And the happy ones are not only the beneficiaries of the systems, like Dr. Dupre, but also the ones that attend the show, enjoying the humiliation and the fall of the powerful, already waiting for the next ranking, when today’s winner will inevitably also hit the ground.

Behind the support for contemporary evaluation systems and its apparent quest for fairness, one may see the sign of a more shadowy and counter-intuitive feeling: *schadenfreude*. This is the feeling of hoping for and enjoying the other’s misfortune, when the other had an attribute that one does not have and then loses it or is deprived of

what he seemed to enjoy. The key benefit of such evaluation systems is that the other cannot acquire anything stable, that no position can be maintained forever. Powell et al. (2008) explain why envy is so closely linked to schadenfreude:

Envy is a painful emotion derived from the presence of a desired attribute in another person, and, therefore, the pain is relieved, pleasantly, by something that harms the possessor of this attribute. . . . In fact, the more one considers the nature of envy, the more fitting it seems that an envied person's misfortune should be pleasing. . . . The social comparison foundations of envy mean that misfortunes befalling an envied person should alter the social comparison matrix in the envying person's favor. Sometimes the reversal of fortunes is complete and may turn advantage to disadvantage. (p. 150)

Furthermore, the hostility associated with dominance that one finds in envy may sometimes come about because one's early upbringing fosters an extravagant view of the self that ultimately failed to be confirmed by actual achievement and social evaluations (Sullivan, 1956; Powell et al., 2008). The implementation of an individual performance appraisal system can create the hope for a person to finally get adequately recognized. This may also be a conclusion from Nicolas Belorgey's study that looks into the reasons why the evaluation system in the emergency services may be approved or rejected: the opponents to the system are usually the ones with the highest professional or social recognition, the "Established" ones, as defined by Elias and Scotson (1994); the ones who approve of the evaluation system are normally less recognized and can be classified as the "Outsiders." Interviews with the Outsiders show a certain bitterness or lack of

satisfaction with their position, and highlight their hopes that things will change thanks to the new system.

Finally, another possible mechanism by which envious considerations could motivate the request for such evaluation systems has to do with the desire for instant gratification. Watkins (2004) claims that those predisposed to gratitude may, since they are predisposed to a thankful mindset, be more willing to wait for gratification, while those less disposed to gratitude may be less able to control their urges. As highlighted above, contemporary evaluation systems split work processes into a chain of competitive sessions amongst workers, with the promise of quick and calibrated rewards whereby everyone could know precisely what they will gain; while traditional hierarchical systems are based on longer-term evaluation and less frequent rewards.

## Being Under the Permanent Gaze of the Other

Another potential link between envy and the demand for evaluation systems may be related to the central place of the Other's gaze in envy. To understand this link, let's return to the crucial moment in childhood when the child will separate himself from his mother (the first Other). According to Lacan, this occurs when the child understands that he exists also outside of the image of himself his mother's gaze is sending to him. What he will definitively lose at this moment is what he was in her desire. The fact of not knowing what one is in the Other's desire is accompanied by an omnipresent anxiety (Lacan, 1973, 1986). The kernel of this anxiety is the absolute uncertainty as regards what he is now for the Other: he doesn't know who he is, as he doesn't know what he is for the Other, what he is in the Other's desire. But this questioning is also precisely what will cause the child's own desire.

What characterizes the envious is the fact that he cannot do without the Other's gaze. What the envious desires is to capture the gaze of the Other who is the only one who can give him the illusion of being "complete" (lacking nothing), and the feeling of existing (Vidaillet, 2008b). Imagining that the Other turns her gaze away from him to look at another leaves him with a horrible feeling of being erased, eradicated. His uncertainty about his identity is then too strong, and, instead of making space for his own desire, generates unbearable and extremely painful anxiety.

With contemporary evaluation mechanisms, the person gets to be under the constant gaze of this "big Other." This gaze can materialize under the form of very sophisticated tools and information systems that are able to capture a huge number of data concerning the evaluated person, hence making visible things that no human eyes could ever detect. This omnipresent gaze can also appear under the form of the "mystery shopper" in charge of gathering and analyzing specific information about products and services; or of the "normal" client whose opinion is permanently sought.

The Other is not only watching what workers are doing and what they produce; "He" gives an appreciation, assigns precise values, which can then be translated into incentives, promotions, etc. This feedback may come from managers. Hence, the chief executive officer (CEO) of Carglass, talking about the firm's employees, explains in a documentary that *"for them (the 'co-workers') to be happy, . . . they need a boss who's capable of helping them develop, of pushing, coaching them, that is to say to tell them when they're doing well and when they're not."* Further on, a human resources manager—who trains the managers of Carglass centers—says: *"The notion of acknowledgement of the people we work with, implies that one . . . tells them when things*

*are fine but also when they're not. 'There are things we're happy with . . . well done' (he claps his hands); and then 'there are things we're not happy about, so . . . it's not well done' (Viallet, 2009).*

It also frequently happens that this feedback does not come from a “real” Other. For instance, in a restaurant chain, all restaurants are evaluated monthly; many performance indicators are used, and at the end of each appraisal session, the computer gives marks from one to ten according to how successful the restaurant has been in achieving its objectives. When they are interviewed, the employees say: *“It's very inspiring, because once you've put the data into the computer, you have to wait for the answer and then you know if you're doing well or not! What is ok and what isn't ok. That's the only motivating thing in this job”* (Montchatre, 2011).

The link between evaluation and gaze has been widely commented on by researchers who use the thought of Michel Foucault to denounce how disciplinary and normative power is exercised through evaluation systems (Gori & Del Vogo, 2009). But this conception does not allow us to understand why people may seek this gaze, and why they are waiting for this feedback on what they are supposed to be. From what does the subject feel he can escape by entrusting the Other with defining “what is ok” and “what isn't ok” about him? From the anxiety that comes with his desire; from this part of himself that makes him move but escapes him. It is difficult to cope with the anxiety of not knowing what we are in the Other's desire, and at the same time to be affected by this desire. The illusion brought about by contemporary evaluation practices is to believe that it might be possible to escape this anxiety. And as the envious are particularly prone to feel that anxiety, our hypothesis is therefore that envy may prompt the subject to ask to

be evaluated, so as to feel that he is always under the Other's gaze and to hope that he can avoid the anxiety of never knowing exactly "who he is."

## An Other to Give Enjoyment

The envious wants to capture the Other's gaze, so as to feel that he exists, but also to ensure that the Other takes enjoyment in seeing him. What the envious would like is to completely fulfil the Other's desire, so that the Other then has no need to look anywhere else. The envious believes that the condition for him to stop feeling the lack, for him to feel whole, is to enable the Other himself to not lack anything. In the scene described by Saint Augustine and commented on by Lacan, the envious child suffers from seeing his mother look with such pleasure at his younger brother whom she is breastfeeding. The issue here is not that the older child is not given the breast (he was weaned a long time ago), but that he has lost his mother's gaze and with it the illusion of entirely fulfilling her, of being his mother's unique object of desire.

In this story, as Lacan puts it, "there is a big Other to give pleasure [*jouissance*] to." Thus, our hypothesis here is that the fantasy of being the one who gives the Other enjoyment, which is at play in envy, is where the demand for evaluation comes from. Who, in evaluation, is this big Other to give enjoyment? It may be the manager. It may also be the client. He is the One whom one must ultimately answer to, the One one wants to please completely and fully. That's Him, the Other who wants His money's worth and Whom the subject has to please whatever the cost. The figure of the king-client (Dujarier, 2006) justifies the whole evaluation chain. It is in order to satisfy Him that the subject is evaluated and that the latter accepts being evaluated. Thus, in Carglass (Viallet, 2009), during a training seminar for new employees, the trainer explains: "*We want every single*

*client who contacts Carglass to say ‘Wow, that was an exceptional experience! I really didn’t expect, when I contacted a place like Carglass, to experience this level of proximity, of service quality.’ The way you answer the phone—don’t we often say that it is the first impression that counts—well, you’re the one who’s going to create this first impression. This is why we say that your role is crucial.”*

And when it comes to activities that do not have to do with objects, but directly with people, when the activities are about caring, educating, protecting, searching, when they involve public money, the trap works even better. Thus, there is a Society, a Citizen, supposedly crouching in the shadows, obsessed about being “accounted to,” able to infallibly judge one’s results, judge what is produced for Him, assess the usefulness of what is done by those who conceive of themselves as great tools serving the Other’s enjoyment.

## Conclusions

In this chapter we have tried to understand a very strange fact: Contemporary evaluation systems have spread across countries to all sorts of organizations despite the complaints and criticism they generate. We have assumed that the growing demand for individual performance appraisal may be partly motivated by envious feelings that develop at the workplace. Evaluation systems may then be regarded as a very interesting social phenomenon: partly motivated by envy, a taboo and unavowable emotion, they cannot be justified as such; hence their development is in general supported by noble and rational statements such as the quest for fairness or transparency

However, we should not forget another very important link between envy and individual performance appraisal systems: as mentioned in the introduction, they can also



trigger envy. Which then creates a vicious circle: envy being potentially at the root of systems that will then strengthen it. This confirms that envy is an emotion that no society can claim to get rid of, especially when the way to cope with it underestimates its destructive potential and misjudges its functioning.

## References

Adler, N., & Harzing, A.-W. (2008). When knowledge wins: Transcending the sense and nonsense of academic rankings. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 8(1), 72-95.

Anderson, K., Burkhauser, R., & Raymond, J. (1993). The effect of creaming on placement rates under the Job Training Partnership Act. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 46(4), 613–624.

Baron, J. M., & Kreps, D. M. (1999). *Strategic Human Resources: Frameworks for General Managers*. New York: Wiley.

Beauvallet, M. (2009). *Les stratégies absurdes: Comment faire pire en croyant faire mieux*. Paris: Seuil.

Belorgey, N. (2010). *L'hôpital sous pression: Enquête sur le nouveau management public*. Paris: La Découverte.

Castilla, E. J. (2008). Gender, race, and meritocracy in organizational careers. *American Journal of Sociology*, 113, 1479–1526.

Castilla, E. J., & Benard, S. (2010). The paradox of meritocracy in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55, 543–576.

Clot, Y. (2010). *Le travail à cœur*. Paris: La Découverte.

- Courty, P., & Marschke, G. (1997). Measuring government performance: Lessons from a federal job-training program. *The American Economic Review*, 87(2), 383–388.
- Dejours, C. (2003). *L'évaluation du travail à l'épreuve du réel*. Paris: INRA éditions.
- Dobbin, F., Schrage, D., & Kalev, A. (2008). Someone to Watch Over Me: Coupling, Decoupling, and Unintended Consequences in Corporate Equal Opportunity. Paper presented at the American Sociological Association Meeting, Boston, MA.
- Dujarier, M. A. (2006). *L'idéal au travail*. Paris: P.U.F.
- Duffy, M. K., Shaw, J. D., & Schaubroeck, J. M. (2008). Envy in organizational life. In R. H. Smith, Ed., *Envy: Theory and Research* (pp. 167–189). Oxford University Press.
- Elias, N., & Scotson, J. L. (1994). *The Established and the Outsiders*. London: Sage.
- Foster, G. M. (1972). The anatomy of envy: a study in symbolic behaviour. *Current Anthropology*, 13(2), 165–201.
- Foucault, M. (1994). L'extension sociale de la norme. *Dits et écrits. t. III* (pp. 74–79). Paris, Gallimard.
- Foucault, M. (2004). *Naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France, 1978–1979*. Paris, Gallimard.
- Gardner, W. L., & Martinko, M. J. (1988). Impression management in organizations. *Journal of Management*, 14(2), 321–338.
- Gori, R., & Del Volgo, M. J. (2009). L'idéologie de l'évaluation: un nouveau dispositif de servitude volontaire? *Nouvelle Revue de psychosociologie*, 2(8), 11–26.
- Heider, F. (1958). *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. New York: John Wiley.
- Lacan, J. (1962). L'identification. Le séminaire. Livre IX (unpublished).

Lacan, J. (1986). *L'éthique de la psychanalyse. Le séminaire. Livre VII. 1959–1960.* Paris: Seuil.

Lacan, J. (2004). *L'angoisse. Le séminaire. Livre X. 1962–1963.* Paris: Seuil.

Leach, C. W. (2008). Envy, inferiority, and injustice: Three bases for anger about inequality. In R. H. Smith, Ed., *Envy: Theory and Research* (pp. 94–116). New York: Oxford University Press.

Lindholm, C. (2008). Culture and envy. In R. H. Smith, Ed., *Envy: Theory and Research* (pp. 227–244). New York: Oxford University Press.

Linn, R. (2000). Assessments and accountability. *Educational Researcher*, 29(2), 4–16.

Longnecker, C. O., Sims, H. P., & Gioia, D. A. (1996). Behind the mask: The politics of employee appraisal. In G. R. Ferris & M. R. Buckley, Eds., *Human Resources Management: Perspectives. Context. Functions and Outcomes* (3rd ed., pp. 183–195). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Methys/IFOP (2011). Les salariés et la performance après la crise. Available at

<http://www.methys.com/docs/PresentationMETHYS.pdf>

Molinier, P. (2008). *Les enjeux psychiques du travail. Introduction à la psychodynamique de travail.* Paris: Payot.

Montchatre, M. (2011). Ce que l'évaluation fait au travail—Normalisation du client et mobilisation différentielle des collectifs dans des chaînes hôtelières. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 189(September), 42–57.

Nickerson, J., & Zenger, T. (2007). Envy, Comparison Costs, and the Economic Theory of the Firm. Unpublished manuscript, Washington University.

- Nurse, L. (2005). Performance appraisal, employee development and organizational justice: Exploring the linkages. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 16(7), 1176–1194.
- Parrott, W. G. (1991). The emotional experiences of envy and jealousy. In P. Salovey, Ed., *The Psychology of Jealousy and Envy* (pp. 3–30). New York: Guilford.
- Powell, C. A. J., Smith, R. H., & Schurtz, D. R. (2008). *Schadenfreude* caused by an envied person's pain. In R. H. Smith, Ed., *Envy: Theory and Research* (pp. 148–164). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Prendergast, C. (1993). A theory of “yes men.” *The American Economic Review*, 83(4), 757–771.
- Rice, B. (1996). Performance review: The job nobody likes. In G. R. Ferris & M. R. Buckley, Eds., *Human Resources Management: Perspectives. Context. Functions and Outcomes* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 213–232). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Schaubroeck, J., & Lam, S. S. K. (2004). Comparing lots before and after: Promotion rejectees' invidious reactions to promotes. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 94, 33–47.
- Schimmel, S. (2008). Envy in Jewish thought and literature. In R. H. Smith, Ed., *Envy: Theory and Research* (pp. 17–38). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schoeck, H. (1969). *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World.
- Smith, R. H. (1991). Envy and the sense of injustice. In P. Salovey, Ed., *Psychological Perspectives on Jealousy and Envy* (pp. 79–99). New York: Guilford.

Smith, R. H., Combs, D. J. Y., & Thielke, S. M. (2008). Envy and the challenges to good health. In R. H. Smith, Ed., *Envy: Theory and Research* (pp. 291–314). New York: Oxford University Press.

Stein, M. (2000). “Winners” training and its trouble. *Personnel Review*, 29(4), 445–460.

Sullivan, H. S. (1956). *Clinical Studies in Psychiatry*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Taylor, M. S., Tracy, K. B., Renard, M. K., Harrison, J. K., & Carroll, S. J. (1995). Due process in performance appraisal: A quasi-experiment in procedural justice. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40, 495–523.

Van de Ven, N., Zeelenberg, M., & Pieters, R. (2009). Leveling up and down: The experiences of benign and malicious envy. *Emotion*, 9(3), 419–429.

Viallet, J. R. (2009). *La mise à mort du travail*. Yami 2 Productions.

Vidaillet, B. (2007). A Lacanian theory’s contribution to the study of workplace envy: A case study. *Human Relations*, 60(11), 1669–1700.

Vidaillet, B. (2008a). *Workplace Envy*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Vidaillet, B. (2008b). Psychoanalytic contributions to understanding envy: Classic and contemporary contributions. In R. H. Smith, Ed., *Envy: Theory and Research* (pp. 267–89). New York: Oxford University Press.

Vidaillet, B. (2013). *Évaluez-moi! Évaluation au travail: les ressorts d’une fascination*. Paris: Seuil.

Watkins, P. C. (2004). Gratitude and subjective well-being. In R. A. Emmons & M. E. McCullough, Eds., *The Psychology of Gratitude* (pp. 167–192). New York: Oxford University Press.

Žižek, S. (2009). *Violence*. London: Profile Books.

Zizzo, D. J. (2008). The cognitive and behavioral economics of envy. In R. H. Smith, Ed., *Envy: Theory and Research* (pp. 190–210). New York: Oxford University Press.