

## Kenneth Grey

# ENVY AND JEALOUSY IN A COMMUNITY

Although the South West London College Counselling Course strives to be and become a **peer** learning community there are both real and fantasied inequalities between its members. These inequalities of talent, experience, role, and opportunity give rise to feelings of envy and jealousy. It is particularly important to bring these feelings into awareness and out into the open because the peers exercise mutual judgements in respect of awarding the Diploma.

A subsidiary reason for exploration, amongst others, is that an illusion (or delusion) of peer status being equivalent to equality is not helpful to learning.

In 1981/82 I facilitated a final year community as a staff member in a workshop on envy and jealousy; both students and staff participated in a large group of about forty.

My starting points were:

1. that there were private or unaware feelings of envy or jealousy in the group
2. that this was a learning community with an overt co-operative ethic and covert competitiveness
3. that individuals had private or unaware fears of being envied or excluded from participation
4. that feelings of envy or jealousy were partly of a "here now" origin and partly transferred from external or earlier situations or persons
5. that individuals would have priority issues of their own to work on

With these ideas in mind I set about devising a structured workshop of three hours: my goals for the group were that individuals would

1. recognise and **declare** their own envious or jealous feelings
2. become aware of feelings directed towards themselves by other members of the group
3. understand the personal origins of such feelings
4. recognise the impact potential of such feelings in a learning community with a co-operative/competitive dimension
5. devise ways of using such feelings optimally in community.

We began at 2 pm by reading a short briefing sheet (see Fig.1)<sup>\*</sup> with some quotations about envy and jealousy designed to point out and/or clarify some relevant issues and moved on to working with one other person in a co-counselling mode to scan one's life for experiences of being envious; we spent twenty minutes on this and then moved on again to working in a new pair on "who I envy **here** for what and the feelings I have" (the four staff worked as two pairs in this).

After these structures, everyone wrote specific statements of envy in regard to people in the room on "envy cards"; this was the moment I anticipated people might balk at the task but no-one did, probably because sufficient time had been spent in the previous activities becoming honestly aware of the feelings present.

After writing "envy cards" (some people wrote several), we milled around giving and collecting cards from people. Some people collected a substantial number of cards; a few people received no cards at all.

I asked people to notice which was the most significant or priority "envy card" during this process and after the milling around suggested that each person should work for five minutes with the person to whom they had given this priority card (that is, the person they most envied in the room). I suggested that they could verbalise their feelings **and** check out whether the attribute envied was real and impossible to achieve, real and possible to achieve, or quite imaginary.

This process upset my timing of the workshop somewhat since some especially envied persons had a queue of others wishing to explore with them.

Following this I suggested that people who had received envy cards might work in pairs for twenty minutes on their fears of being envied, whereas the (smaller) number of those who received no cards worked

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on their own feelings about this outcome (which I speculated aloud might be a wish to be envied: this was probably not a good intervention as it may have closed down the area of exploration). We then moved into groups of four (the staff in their own group) in order to explore envy surrounding individual's skills and the learning contracts which they were in the process of constructing and publishing to the community for feedback.

At this stage it would have been possible to move the workshop laterally into a community task to do with learning contracts and other community business.

As it happened, I continued with the prepared structure and led a guided fantasy on jealousy and asked people to work afterwards in fours, sharing their individual fantasy and whatever feelings it evoked. After this, people milled around for ten minutes sharing something of their fantasies with as many others as possible.

The whole group then spent ten minutes discussing what had arisen in the workshop and what implications it might have for community process. In the final five minutes (too short!) I received feedback on my handling of the workshop. Generally people were pleased with the way it had gone and surprised that they had been able to explore some difficult matters; it was felt that the guided fantasy and subsequent work on jealousy did not have enough time available and more learning seemed to have taken place in the envy part of the workshop (which took by far the greater proportion of time).

I was pleased that I had been able to facilitate a large group to explore envy and jealousy successfully and I attribute this success in part to a previous personal exploration of envious feeling in the staff group. I think that the peer learning community is sometimes blocked by staff blocks (or countertransference) and that an aware staff will seek to explore their own blocks in order to enhance their facilitative endeavours in the community. Unfortunately, this takes staff meeting time which is not adequately resourced and raises questions as to how a peer course staff undertaking very innovative educational work can best represent their course's needs to the institutional host.

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