

## The Trial of Sibling Envy

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Envy is a ubiquitous human emotion, both in its innocuous form and in its more expressive malignant state. As humans we all experience envy. A baby shrieks and screams and wails when their mother holds another infant. Well, why? The envious baby is caught in an existential dilemma and ponders: “Is the other baby funnier? Cooler? Will that baby get better grades? Is it because that baby doesn’t intend on becoming a Political Science major? What’s wrong with me being a Political Science major? Maybe *that* baby has the answers.” Its possible the envious baby may viciously attack the other baby at the next “Mommy and Me” meeting. But, if humans do have the ability to control their envy, to what extent are they able to control it, and can they nurture their envy positively? Can the baby that once cried because their Mother held a different child accept this as a fact of life and move on? Or, will the envious baby always look toward the second baby with hatred? Ultimately, the villainy of envy is present because we are too focused on envy’s expressive harmful elements and overlook its subliminal existence in our lives.

This very conflict happens to have arisen in a class-action lawsuit. The suit was brought before the highest court in existence: The Court of Justice, in which the presiding Judge is Justice itself. In the lawsuit, a group of envious younger siblings sued their older siblings for never allowing them to sit in the front seat of their family’s car, a seat monopolized by the older siblings. The story of the courtroom trial is told:

It was the first time in a long time that the Court of Justice had accepted a civilian case. Billionaires and prominent socialites across the globe often appealed to it for wisdom, guidance, and occasionally, in self-interest, but were never granted a response. As the plaintiffs and defendants walked towards the Court, swarms of reporters clawed to the front of the crowd for a chance to see the inside of the Court of Justice, or to ask the children questions. However, they were given no attention, and the older and younger siblings walked through the Court’s large doors with fierce determination. Inside the Court of Justice, they felt different, altered in some way. The Court had an eternal energy. The kids did not age while in the presence of Judge Justice. The true Court of

Justice could not be seen by the human visitors, it only represented an ideal for humanity to strive for. Rather, for the purpose of entertaining the case, a special room was constructed with white walls and floors for the councils to stand. The children seated themselves at their respective benches, with intense unease and anxiousness. Judge Justice walked into the courtroom, but could not be experienced in any way by onlookers. A thick curtain blocked Judge Justice's appearance, a sound blocking device quieted the Judge's footsteps, and any questions Judge Justice had were translated from the native tongue of Judge Justice: Truism, into English, and transcribed by clerks for all to read. The true form of the Judge was too pure for humanity. Nevertheless, Justice itself was in the courtroom and although the onlookers of the courtroom had no way of knowing Judge Justice had entered the room, the presence of eternal wisdom caused their chatter to grow hushed.

A clerk announced, "All rise, the Court of Justice is now in session. All those who have cause to plea draw near and you shall be heard." A younger sibling plaintiff rose from their bench. The child was elected to be the representative for the petitioners. The childish innocence of the children was shrouded by a sense of purpose and professionalism. The young child, called X, spoke: "May it please the court. I am here today with a simple petition of equal opportunity in the family. The feeling of rejection and not being wanted is not a healthy feeling. The younger siblings and I know that, and they know what it means to be controlled, to be denied, to be casted away, to be relegated to a perpetual state of subservience, because on every road trip in the family car, our wants are overlooked and our morale is trampled. I am speaking of the dismissal of the younger sibling to the backseat of the car, and the elevation of the older sibling to the passenger seat of the car."

Judge Justice had a question for the child. A beep was heard and a sheet of paper was printed, from which the clerk read aloud, "What do you mean by being dismissed to the backseat of the car?"

X replied, "My fellow younger siblings and I feel that we are consistently denied the privilege of sitting in the front seat, and are displaced to the cramped back seats of the

car, because of our status in the family as being younger. Unlike the back, the front seats of the car come with the luxury of visibility, the comfort of A/C, and with the opportunity to be respected as an equal to our older siblings. In my family, every time we go on a long drive and are asked to get in the car, I rush to the passenger seat door. I do everything right. I put on my shoes and coat well before my older sibling, and yet my older sibling bypasses me and sits in the front. The only response I get is, 'Oh... just sit in the back, and don't make a fuss.' I protest and argue that I was there first, but that remains unheard, rather I'm labeled as annoying and disobedient."

The clerk stopped typing, looked up, and read a question from the Judge, "Why do you think the older sibling gets this privilege? Do you think they have attributes that require them to have this advantage?"

X continued, "We assert the only difference between us and our older siblings is age, and it seems unfair for us to wait for the trickle down affection. We are told that they, the older siblings, are better, but never told how or why. Furthermore, sitting in the backseat on long road trips is uncomfortable, and as a result all we can do is dream. Dream that we were older. Dream that we had the opportunity to sit in that passenger seat. We wish to appeal to the court to end this vicious cycle of reinforced oppression, because we think the ageist hierarchy ingrained within our families is not a fair one." X looked up from their papers and sat down.

The law clerk recognized this, and turned to the representative of the older siblings, Y. Y rose from the bench, looked at the audience and spoke: "On the contrary, we feel the younger siblings have a cushy life, they know little of what it means to be on the front lines of taking responsibility. We would like to respond to the claims made by the plaintiffs by first of all acknowledging the differences that have set us apart. Seemingly, sitting in the front seat is a comfortable cushy position in life, in reality it is a symbol of pressure and expectations." The plaintiffs looked at each other rather befuddled.

Y continued: "In the almost anathematic front seat, we are constantly nagged about college, life choices, grades; everything that parents aspire for their kids. We want

our younger counterparts to realize that being older and sitting in the passenger seat is not only about having a free pass to adulthood and freedom, but rather, it is the beginning of the responsibility and stress of growing up. Our younger siblings claimed that being in the passenger seat means you are treated as an equal, treated as an adult. As older kids, we instantly thought, ‘why would you want that?’ Childhood is something to be cherished, not avoided. As older siblings, we merely want to protect this sacred process of maturation in our younger siblings.”

In the same manner as previously, the clerk stopped typing and read a question from Judge Justice. He asked the representative of the older sibling, “How would you respond to the claims of the younger siblings that you have displaced them from the passenger seat without any due process?”

Y replied: “These accusations, we argue, are misplaced. The petitioners are succumbing to vicious envy, which is at the root of this lawsuit. It is wrong to allow a suit fueled by evil envy to taint the good name of Justice. Our younger siblings have, however, allowed this to happen, in their ignorant claim that we have denied them the opportunity to sit in the front seat. We would like to warn our younger siblings to exercise caution, for envy when nurtured leads to aggressive competition, maliciousness, nepotism, contempt, bullying, and general negativity. Sometimes envy makes us feel disgruntled, but letting this feeling grow is harmful and dangerous. Envy brings out the worst in us, and what our younger siblings express is an expression of envy, not an expression of any understanding of the context of this suit. Instead, our younger siblings should understand us, and our role in the family, and not be so selfish to think everyone’s decisions should revolve around them. They fail to acknowledge that we were forced to grow up faster because of them, that we had to mature earlier to be a role model. Sitting in the passenger seat is not a question of equity, but responsibility, and if we had the chance, we would gladly abandon our responsibilities and switch positions with our younger counterparts to be children again.” Y paused, looked outside at the grey sky and decided to sit down.

The room was quiet, both parties had stated their arguments. The audience awaited Judge Justice. The eerie sound of the printer started up again, and attention shifted to the clerk. The room heard Judge Justice's opinion translated by the clerk, who pronounced; "The trial brings to light the janus-faced nature of envy. Envy is a staple in sibling rivalries and thus has a role in both the younger and older sibling's arguments, as the dynamic relationship between the petitioners and defendants is one of shared envy. While envy is made out to seem malicious in intent by the older siblings, in the circumstances presented, envy is a natural emotion caused by denial, may it be the denial of the passenger seat, or the denial of a longer childhood. Both sides view the other with envy, and they are justified in their emotions; younger siblings *are* denied the autonomy of choice, and the older siblings *are* denied their childhood. The younger siblings aspire for the passenger seat of the car, not because they like the peripheral pleasures, but because they want to be like their older siblings, and envy their position of authority. The older siblings feel the same way, as they desire to be a kid again. The caveat remains that envy has a negative side, if it is cultivated and used with the intention to harm another. However, justified envy, as expressed by the siblings here is not harmful, and is just, because it is an inherent part of whom they are."

Judge Justice had given a ruling.