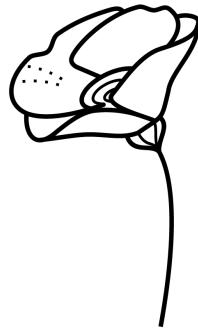


# THE TALL POPPY SYNDROME



## THE JOY OF CUTTING OTHERS DOWN

by  
Douglas Garland, MD.

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A Tall Poppy, in Australian terms, is someone noticeably successful as defined by wealth, prestige, prowess, rank or even birth that may attract hostility, envious attention, or malevolence. Some people holding this Tall Poppy person in contempt may attempt to cause failure or disgrace by “cutting” him or her “down to size”; thus causing their target to be “tall-poppied” as a victim of the “Tall Poppy Syndrome” (TPS). Awareness of TPS is rarely noted in the United States despite being documented in most countries using various metaphors, words, or phrases.

*The Tall Poppy Syndrome: The Joy of Cutting Others Down*

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Produced by Brian Schwartz for Wise Media Group  
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This book is dedicated to  
Laine, Tatum, Jack, and Oliver.

May you grow to become Tall Poppies.

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# Glossary

***åsiktskorridor*** (Swedish)—The “opinion corridor”;<sup>1</sup> the range of acceptable opinions on a subject before others become uncomfortable; leads to conformity, consensus, cooperation.

**cuttee**—A tall poppy who has been cut down.

**cutter**—One who cuts down a TP.

**differential diagnosis**—A disease having similar signs and symptoms to, or sometimes confused with, the working diagnosis (our working diagnosis is Tall Poppy Syndrome).

**Dolchstoss** (German)—A “stab in the back”;<sup>2</sup> a means of cutting someone down.

**emotion**—A feeling that generates an impulse to act; a combination of physiological, behavioral, experiential, and cognitive responses.

**envy**—Desiring another’s superior quality, achievement, or possession, or wishing the other lacked it. **Good, or benign, envy** stimulates improvement, especially by emulating someone better. **Bad, or malicious, envy** is often found in low-esteem individuals and triggers cutting down someone better; one of the infamous seven deadly sins.

**evil eye**—A curse caused by a malevolent glare some cultures believe may result in an injury or misfortune.

**folkelig** (Danish)—“Popular”;<sup>3</sup> of the people; traditions of the commoner. Antonym: elite.

**forme pleine** (French)—“complete, or full-blown, form of a disease”;<sup>4</sup> every sign and symptom is present, confirming a disease; a classic example.

**forme fruste** (French)—“Unfinished form”;<sup>5</sup> an atypical or attenuated manifestation of a syndrome but not so well defined as to fit the diagnosis (common in people just learning about a diagnosis). A disease might seem similar to TPS more than any other disease but does not have all the signs and symptoms; similar to TPS but does not fit in the differential diagnosis list.

**Fremdschämen** (German)—Feeling for someone else’s actions; embarrassment for others who have embarrassed themselves.

**Gluckschmerz** (German)—“Luck pain”;<sup>6</sup> annoyance felt at the good fortune of others. Some think this word was invented by non-Germans.

**hierarchical exfoliation** (coined by Laurence J. Peter)—The supercompetent (TPs) are dismissed (cut down) because they disrupt the hierarchy; also happens to the incompetent.<sup>7</sup>

**hygge** (Danish)—“Coziness”;<sup>8</sup> a convivial way of spending time together that celebrates sameness.

**lagom** (Swedish)—“Not too little, not too much”;<sup>9</sup> according to the law or accepted custom; what is reasonable, rational, fair.

**Law of Jante**—*Janteloven*; Danish Ten Commandments of social norm (prohibitions).

**philistinism**—Hostility or indifference to culture and the arts; or lack of understanding thereof.

**maaiveldcultuur** (Dutch)—“Ground-level culture”;<sup>10</sup> everything that exceeds ground level should be cut down; inhibit the individual.

**malignant social media (MSM)**—Malignant side of social media driven by bad envy, though many users do not realize it.

**Rubicon moment**—Crossing a “bounding or limiting line... irrevocably.”

**runt poppy, or short poppy (RP or SP)**—An egregious TP who has been cut down; or a self-absorbed person who thinks he or she is a TP, contrary to general opinion.

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**schadenfreude** (German)—“Harm-joy”;<sup>11</sup> pleasure from another’s pain; often confused with or part of the Tall Poppy Syndrome but not a necessary sign or symptom.

**sine qua non** (Latin)—“Indispensable condition”;<sup>12</sup> certain signs and symptoms must be present to confirm a diagnosis.

**syndrome**—A characteristic combination of opinions, emotions, or behaviors; a group of signs and symptoms that are associated with a disease, condition, or disorder.

**tall poppy (TP)**—Noun: a person or institution that is conspicuously but deservedly successful and attracts envy; or a person who attracts envious notice or hostility due to egregious behavior (some argue this person is no longer a TP). Verb: to cut down a TP (e.g., Tom was tall popped).

**tall poppydom**—The stature a TP reaches, especially after others’ attempts to cut the TP down.

**tall poppy paradox**—When a TP hired to improve a situation is confronted by pushback, usually by the hierarchy. TPs who accommodate the natives cut themselves down by acquiescence.

**Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS)**—A mediocre-maintaining mechanism in which others disparage or discredit a person or institution that has achieved notable wealth or prominence (**public TPS**); usually occurs within a tribe but may occur from afar (**private TPS**).

**tall weed (TW)**—An undeserved TP status.



# Foreword

By Dr. David Hanscom

Dr. Douglas Garland has researched and examined an age-old human tendency, namely, that we emotionally and physically cut other people down when they perceive that the other person is more successful than we are or has more power than we do.

He thoroughly researched the endless ways in which human beings have repeatedly cut each other down throughout history. His in-depth research has provided us with a treasure trove of stories about the many ways this has and continues to occur.

History is rife with treachery, political take downs, crooked business dealings, gossip, hearsay, and betrayal. By diving deeply into the details of history, Dr. Garland allows you to clearly see the pattern play out in many ways.

It is disturbing that being tall-poppied also happens to well-meaning people who have contributed so much good, as well as to those who have become too powerful or destructive. Opponents are happy to unite long enough to take him or her down. But why would well-meaning people also be attacked? It is not rational.

This book, by creating an awareness of the problem from a social and historical perspective, allows you to see how this universal tendency manifests in your own life. You will see your behaviors in a different light and understand why you may have been Tall Poppied. Few people are truly happy for another person's success.

What about gossiping? We have compromised someone's character. The Jewish term for it is, lashon hara, which means "evil speech." When you see someone whom you perceive as superior to you fail, how do you feel? Do you feel compassion or pleasure? If we feel inadequate, we can either learn to accept these feelings, continue to be miserable or find a way to cut someone else down.

The value of this book is highlighting the issue based on meticulously researched history. There are many events described that you would not normally consider Tall Poppy syndromes that clearly

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are. The first step in dealing with any problem is seeing and understanding it.

Dr. Hanscom is a retired spine orthopedic surgeon. In 2019, he left his surgical practice of 32 years to focus on teaching patients how to break loose from the grip of chronic mental and physical pain – with and without surgery. His book, *Back in Control: A Surgeon's Roadmap Out of Chronic Pain* has sold over 80,000 copies. Learn more at [www.backincontrol.com](http://www.backincontrol.com).

# Preface

“You’ve been tall poppied.” Over the phone, my Australian medical colleague unwittingly introduced me to the Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS) metaphor.

Confused, I sheepishly asked the phrase’s significance.

“If you look at a poppy field and see a poppy taller than the rest, someone will cut down the tall one so all are the same height.”

Apparently, this was a mediocre-maintaining mechanism. Had I become a victim of TPS?

I had just completed a presentation at a national medical meeting in the United States. Upon returning to my office—the proverbial large, corner power room with a window—I found a notice on the door. My workspace had been relocated to a cubbyhole down the hall. In our organizational hierarchy, this represented a major demotion. I returned to private practice soon after but could not banish the nagging questions about my mistreatment: What was the meaning and significance of TPS? Did it exist in America? Was it occurring but unrecognized? Was I a victim? Was America itself a victim?

Once retired, I had time to research the Tall Poppy Syndrome. I tapped into medical library system resources for a year. Printed articles ended up on the floor of my home office in various groupings. Although unsuitable for a Marie Kondo household, this untidy arrangement was effective for concept formation and writing preparation.

When I was confident I understood and could recognize TPS, I signed on for electronic editions of high-profile American newspapers and magazines. These provided an observational component, the first step in the scientific method. Daily I searched for TPS-type occurrences, and, to my astonishment, daily I found examples in America that seemed completely unrecognized by the public.

Since TPS was so prevalent, the public ought to know about it. But first I wanted to properly study the issue. I was not in a position to perform or publish an experimental scientific study—observation,

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hypothesis, testing, conclusion. More importantly, purely scientific articles limit readership.

An observational investigation was needed, and my journey formulated a world's-eye view of TPS. In science, observational studies often provide early articles, especially when data is limited. These studies may be more readable and reachable than data-driven, experimental studies.

Relying on observation did not prevent my using the hypothesis step of the scientific method. Because **cutters** in other cultures were frequently motivated by **envy** and justification, I had a strong interest in cutter motives in the US. Did America's society of constitutional individuals hinder TPS? And would the younger generation's shift from individualism toward social democracy and collectivism increase the incidence of TPS?

Although eradicating my assumptions and biases was impossible, I tried to write with a keen awareness of them. Remember that some information herein is subjective—my **tall poppy (TP)** may not be your tall poppy. I encourage you to approach the TPS metaphor without bias.

Proper scientific methodology to define the Tall Poppy Syndrome in America will be the purview of social psychologists. And that definition will differ from other countries and times due to our specific culture and mores. This book is, perhaps, the first step.

# Introduction



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The Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS) metaphor visualizes a field of poppies wherein the tallest are cut down so all poppies are the same size. People don't like being inferior to others and want to bring them down to size. Although this is a **syndrome**, it is not a virus or bacteria and cannot be caught.

Conceptually, TPS is a mediocre-maintaining mechanism. Practically, the metaphor can be complicated, so I have developed the following parameters:

**You do not need to be “tall” to be cut down.** Famous, egregious tall poppies (TPs) who become victims of TPS are newsworthy, which reinforces the TP concept and sells newspapers. I label this **public TPS**. These TPs are well known to many and recognized as TPs, but they make up a small part of the TPS population. When they fall due to their egregious activities, others are aware of it and experience **schadenfreude**.

The majority of victims are mediocre people trying to make an honest living. This **private TPS** causes Tall Poppy Syndrome to be misunderstood. Most people who are cut down are our neighbors, friends, fellow workers—our tribes. Twenty percent of Australians claim they have been tall popped. That many public TPs cannot exist in their egalitarian society. As such, commoners are the ones being cut down. Few may know these TPs, and even fewer experience

schadenfreude at their falls since no one cares. If you remember this first parameter, you will not be easily confused about TPS.

**TPs who are not egregious or conspicuous may still be cut down.**

Many TPs with egregious or conspicuous behaviors are cut down; however, the cutters' motives may be egregious and the TPs may be saints. In some egalitarian countries, public TPs are cut down simply because they are TPs. The individual is climbing the corporate ladder, and someone in the office attempts to prevent that.

**TPs are not determined by ballot.** My TP may not be your TP. A consensus is not necessary by the masses. Former President Bill Clinton is a TP. The fact that some think he is not confirms he is, because of their awareness about him.

**Cutter envy and behavior may be good or bad.** Early definitions of TPS included an “envious” cutter, but TPS initially did not take the duality of envy into account. Cutters may possess **bad envy** and cut down good *or* bad TPs. Cutters with **good envy** may emulate the accomplishments of egregious TPs but still be justified in cutting them down. If a cutter’s thinking is misguided, however, the cutting may be unjustified. Beware, the cutter may be the problem and not the cure.

**TPs are victims even if they do not remain cut down.** Most people on their journey to **tall poppydom** are cut down but make a comeback. They are still victims of TPS when they do not fall completely out of favor. Steve Jobs was cut down but bounced back; Bill Cosby did not.

**Observers’ opinions are often biased.** Before the internet and social media—especially the **malignant social media (MSM)**—TPS normally involved one cutter and one TP. Observers could easily identify the problem and the problem person. Now social media, as well, is involved in cutting, especially through movements. Because observers are at a distance from the fight, they can think somewhat objectively. But their brains might not rein in their **emotions** because of bias, leading to inappropriate judgments. Observation determines whether the cutter or the TP acted inappropriately, but envy (bias) can steer that comparison in the wrong direction.

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A novice could make an incorrect diagnosis of TPS or confuse it with another entity. This is not uncommon—even Australians, who are the experts, misdiagnose TPS. In medicine we say “one will not diagnosis it unless one knows it.” A corollary is “the eye sees only what the mind is prepared to comprehend.”<sup>13</sup> This book will help you “see” and “know” and, most importantly, increase your self-awareness.

Overall, America does not recognize TPS. I originally thought it might be the result of our worship of the individual due to our Bill of Rights and Constitution, and perhaps Christianity. I was wrong and have discovered multiple examples of TPS, beginning with colonization. Then I thought our ignorance of TPS might be due to our meritocracy and our business environment, which are part of social Darwinism (survival of the fittest). Still, I found many examples of TPS, especially in the business world (**hierarchical exfoliation**).

Among other things, social democrats desire to narrow the gap between rich and poor. The more collective we become, the greater the likelihood of TPS as noted in egalitarian Anglospheric countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and, to some extent, Canada. Egalitarian countries such as the Scandinavian countries, Japan, and Holland know the syndrome well but label it differently. It is part of their culture as it has been part of many others for centuries. Perhaps awareness of TPS will become part of ours.



As you read this book, you will find many nuances of TPS. Remain detached and unbiased. I am attempting to instruct, not convert. Remember the two prime examples of TPS and you will not become confused: (1) A cutter with bad envy cuts down a good TP and (2) A cutter’s righteous indignation justifies cutting down a bad TP. These are the classic cases (*forme pleine*) of TPS.



# Chapter 1 - Tall Poppy Syndrome

“WE DON’T SEE THINGS AS THEY ARE,  
WE SEE THEM AS WE ARE.”

—UNKNOWN

For the English-speaking world, reviewing research from Australia and New Zealand, where the Tall Poppy Syndrome is a national pastime, is crucial to understanding the metaphor. Two researchers stand out: Bert Peeters, PhD, has published in the area of linguistics. Norman Feather, PhD, has published within experimental social psychology (the study of human social behavior that includes moral behavior). Once we grasp the metaphor, a brief study of where it originated exemplifies the drama that has played out time and again through history.

## Definitions

Dictionary.com lists two definitions for the Tall Poppy Syndrome:

(1) “a tendency to begrudge, resent, or mock people of great success, talent, or status: *In our culture of tall poppy syndrome, the more I succeed, the more people try to cut me down.*”

(2) “a tendency to downplay one’s own achievements or talent in order to avoid the resentment and mockery of others: *When we observe these students suppressing their natural and exceptional gifts, we are looking at the tall poppy syndrome.*”<sup>14</sup>

This book will focus on the first definition because those circumstances are much more common and obvious than those described by the second. However, you will see later in this chapter that Livy described both definitions in his account of Brutus, who

wore a disguise to hide his true character from a despot king. He later led a charge to overthrow (cut down) the tyrannical monarchy.<sup>15</sup> I also believe one of the workplace mechanisms females employ to prevent TPS lies in the second definition.

Australia is fully aware of TPS and replete with definitions for its various aspects. *The Australian National Dictionary* states a **tall poppy** is “a person who is conspicuously successful; freq[uently] one whose distinction, rank, or wealth attracts envious hostility or notice.” Three important components are distinction, conspicuousness, and envy. This definition gave rise to the negative labeling of TPs in Australia.

*The Penguin Book of Australian Slang* states a TP is “a very important person; an influential person; a person with status—often held in contempt by others, who try to bring about this person’s downfall or ruin.” This description omits conspicuousness from TPS and changes hostility and envy to contempt. Here, a TP is an important person with some negative connotations.

*The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (1997) defines TPS as “the habit of denigrating or ‘cutting down’ those who are successful, high achievers, etc.” This describes the successful TP without negative connotations toward the TP or the cutter.<sup>16</sup>

The wordings of these definitions have contributed to persistent confusion in Australia<sup>17</sup> and will be problematic in the United States as TPS becomes more recognized here. Notice the use of negative words such as *conspicuously*, *envious*, *hostility*, *contempt*, *downfall*, *ruin*, and *denigrating*. We might assume TPS, TPs, and cutters are never good. As clarified in the introduction, however, good and bad forms of each exist, and TPs are not necessarily well known. A look at the understanding of TPS through the years reveals that the definitions have not kept up with evolving connotations.

In Australia TPs were once generally seen as successful males, usually business leaders, who became rich and famous but were then the targets of criticism due to gratuitous narcissism. In other words, they were considered egotistical braggarts and remain so to many Australians. While not calling them TPs, Americans have long recognized braggarts and attribute the following phrase to Davy Crockett (regarding Andrew Jackson): “I liked him well once: but when a man gets too big for his breeches, I say Good bye.”<sup>18</sup>

As times changed, the conception shifted to include women. Glass ceilings broke, women’s movements happened, political correctness

arrived, and to some extent, the characterization of TPs arrived at including more females and allowing that cutter envy may be good at times.

In fact, Feather and the Australian government, among others, want to celebrate achievement and encourage entrepreneurship by fostering TPs who could be leaders that inspire future generations to follow their footsteps. Susan Mitchell wrote many books describing and interviewing female Australian TPs. America, too, has many examples of both genders whose lives and successes we admire and write books about.

The proper verb to deal with TPs has also gone through changes. *Lop off* was applied at one time, perhaps appropriately since heads were literally lopped off of some individuals in past centuries. In modern times, the connotation required modification, and other verbs have been used for eliminating TPs: *pull out, prune, fell, topple, tear down, mow down*, and *chop down*. Severing is still part of the verb, but not the head. *Cut down to size*, especially the shortened *cut down*, is a popular phrase used today.

The English verb *gloat* (“to feel or express great pleasure or satisfaction because of your own success or good luck, or someone else’s failure or bad luck”<sup>19</sup>) does not necessarily include malice. Gloating hints of a victory over another. US English is only beginning to recognize TPS and is without a verb to describe it in some dictionaries, but many other languages have similar words, metaphors, and phrases.

## Scientific Studies

Feather has written extensively on TPS and was instrumental in designating the TP as a good person. He developed a tall poppy scale of ten positive and ten negative attitudes, which he used for many of his studies. His list can make us aware of our own attitudes. People may possess some of these traits but be unaware of them until they see them in black and white. He tested for the following opinions:

- Successful people deserve all the rewards they get for their achievements.
- It’s good to see successful people fail occasionally.
- Successful people often get too big for their boots.

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- People who are successful in what they do are usually friendly and helpful to others.
- With school it's probably better for students to rank near the middle of the class than to be the top student.
- People shouldn't criticize or knock the successful.
- Successful people who fall from the top usually deserve their fall from grace.
- Those who are successful ought to come down off their pedestals and be like other people.
- A successful person should receive public recognition for his/her accomplishments.
- People who are tall poppies should be cut down to size.
- One should always respect the person at the top.
- One ought to be sympathetic to successful people when they experience failure or fall from their high positions.
- Successful people sometimes need to be brought back a peg or two, even when they have done nothing wrong.
- Society needs high achievers.
- People who always do a lot better than others need to learn what it's like to fail.
- People who are at the top usually deserve their high positions.
- It's common for society to support and encourage successful people.
- Successful people get too full of their importance.
- Successful people usually succeed at the expense of other people.
- Successful people who are at the top of their fields are usually fun to be with.

In 1989 Feather studied students' attitudes because the ways cutters relate to high achievers and their falls depend on the judges' beliefs. Students felt that if others achieve success, they must maintain modesty and humility without conveying superiority. Success was acceptable if achievers earned it. "Deservingness" is a personal judgment of whether others are responsible for their outcomes.

If the students exhibited any of Feathers's ten negative attitudes, others were candidates for being cut down to size via the mediocre-

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maintaining mechanism of TPS. Students were more punitive when a high achiever cheated compared to an average person, and students felt more pleasure when high achievers fell than when average people fell. Even so, students with the negative attitudes were more likely to have low self-esteem and, therefore, were more supportive after TPs fell.

In 1991 Feather studied reactions to people who have fallen in public life (sports, politics, entertainment). Study participants were more pleased with TPs who earned their statuses by internal rather than external causes and those who were judged favorably as people. The students were more disturbed when these TPs fell than the TPs with less-favorable characteristics. The study group was more forgiving when TPs fell through no fault of their own.

In a 1992 study, he asked students to evaluate high-performing achievers and average achievers on test scores. Students felt empathy if a high achiever had a poor outcome due to illness, but not laziness. The study demonstrated that perceived deservingness for achievement outcomes was related to attributions of responsibility.

His 1993 study of political leaders demonstrated that success was more likely to be deserved if a leader's behavior was competent and characterized by integrity and lack of arrogance. Political success was undeserved if the leader behaved oppositely. People often apply similar criteria regarding the US political arena.

Feather's international study in 1993 involved self-esteem in Australian versus Japanese university students and their attitudes toward high achievers. Japanese students felt the high achiever could not deviate from the collective and a person must be self-deprecating as opposed to the more self-determined individual in Western societies. The study groups exhibited contrasting independence and interdependence, with the Australians being more independent.

Feather's work demonstrated that envy drives TPS—wanting what the other had or negating their happiness (bad envy) or justification/deservingness (good envy deciding the TP deserved to fall). He also demonstrated that cutters go after politicians (authority figures), sports figures, and business people—almost always male. They rarely cut down artists, academics, professionals, or scientists.<sup>20</sup>

A 2006 US study by Mandisodza, Jost, and Unzueta evaluated the responses of Americans and Australians to those who were born rich or poor and ended rich or poor. Respondents in both countries

regarded poor-to-rich people as competent and likable compared to those who went from rich to poor. The differences were greater in the American context than in the Australian. Americans interpreted being born rich as fair and legitimate within an economic system, but Australians perceived that system less as fair or legitimate.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, Mouly and Sabjarab evaluated New Zealand's manifestation of TPS. They identified TPs as individuals or organizations and cutters as individuals or societies. This scheme is valuable and has many applications for the American experience. They categorized TPS as follows:

- Type I (A)—Direct: a peer-to-peer attack.
- Type I (B)—Indirect: detractors are not direct peers. For example, parents of a gifted child may be tall popped by other parents, not other children.
- Type II—Individual versus society: the denigration of a high achiever, such as an executive who draws an excessive salary, as viewed by society.
- Type III—Organization versus peer: other companies may try to discredit tall poppy companies.
- Type IV—Organization versus society: society against a company's profits or product. Organizational TPS can include movements, which are often responsible for TPS in the United States.<sup>22</sup>

**To the above list,  
I will add a TPS type of my own:**

Type V—Government versus everyone and everything: government leadership, its agencies, or individuals within the deep state discredit (cut down) individuals, groups, products, companies, even entire industries.

Governments have been guilty of TPS, both literally and figuratively, for centuries and are among the largest groups of cutters. As one type of organization, the government has its own category as a purveyor of TPS to emphasize its role because it should be the protector, not the taker, of our rights, unless that is deserved, of course.

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Feather summarized twenty years of his work in his article “Tall Poppies, Deservingness, and Schadenfreude,” including the information from his above studies. His work surpasses the simple envy-of-the-TP model.

The most common variable he found was deservingness. A positive outcome that followed a positive action was deserved and balanced, but a positive outcome that followed a negative action—such as a high mark after cheating—was unbalanced.

He also labeled some cutters as “favor-fall” types. These people had lower self-esteem and were lower in power and achievement values, so they judged TPs as more deserving of their falls. More left in political orientation, they valued equality highly. Favor-fall types took pleasure after the fall (schadenfreude).

Outcomes determined various emotions linked to deservingness—pleasure, pride, anger, resentment, guilt, and regret.<sup>23</sup>

## Diagnosing TPS

*Syndrome* means a variety of signs and symptoms that correlate with each other to define a specific disease. The concept was developed by Ibn Sina (AD 980–1037) and refined in the seventeenth century by Thomas Sydenham.<sup>24</sup>

Medically speaking, a syndrome connotes a complex condition consisting of a combination of physical evidence and complaints along with some type of confirming lab work. The complete gamut of signs and symptoms is rarely exhibited in a disease, but when it is, the disease is categorized as classic.

Psychologists adopted the word *syndrome* in the fifties, leading to more-widespread use of the term. The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* states a syndrome is “a group of symptoms that collectively indicate or characterize a disease, disorder, or other condition considered abnormal.”<sup>25</sup> TPS fits this definition. Although TPS has been called a virus, it is not transmitted by contact or confirmed by lab work.

**Sine qua non** is when specific symptoms of a condition must be present to confirm the diagnosis, even if other symptoms are going on. **Forme fruste** is when signs and symptoms are merely similar to a disease but not enough to confirm a diagnosis. The latter allows a practitioner some latitude to be inclusive but not specific. As TPS

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becomes more recognized in the United States, variations of its components will lead to under- and overdiagnosis. Although the scientific community has refined the definition, the public sometimes incorrectly claims victimization by TPS.

The sine qua non of TPS requires three components: (1) a high achiever, usually justified, (2) a cutter having various emotions, and (3) the fall. That is a textbook, medical school, and research-type definition. Real-life experiences we encounter may be simple, however, and not require a TP but a member of our tribe.

Suppose a new position is posted in your workplace. An envious person begins a cut-down campaign to denigrate a more qualified competitor to prevent that person from securing the position. The envier cannot raise his own ability, so he attempts to cut down the other. This is the mediocre-maintaining mechanism at its worst and what most people will witness. This everyday variety of TPS does not make the news, where instances are high-profile and follow the textbook definition.

Adjusting classical TPS to an egregious TP, we would find (1) a high-profile person; (2) the TP's development of deficiencies in full view, such as grandstanding, ego trips, boasting, or other obnoxious behavior; (3) cutter(s) with highly charged emotions; and (4) a significant fall to mediocrity or less.

Sometimes people attempt to cut someone down, but the TP survives the cutting. Although the TPS complex is incomplete, the TP is still a victim.

Other signs or symptoms could be added. If the fall is far enough, the cutter can experience schadenfreude, which some consider frosting on the cheerful cake. TPS does not require schadenfreude to complete the syndrome, and it may occur independently from TPS as well.

## The Metaphor

THOSE WHO DO NOT REMEMBER THE PAST ARE  
CONDEMNED TO REPEAT IT.

—GEORGE SANTAYANA

With a better understanding of what TPS is, we will look at where the metaphor started: ancient Greece and Rome. The Gauls destroyed most of Rome's historical records when they sacked it around 386 BC. Thereafter, historians borrowed from Greek history and legends. During 29–27 BC, Titus Livius (Livy) wrote five books of Roman history and included the accounts behind the Tall Poppy Syndrome metaphor. Livy's writings on the Roman Kingdom were not true accounts, and many of his stories were Greek with a Roman flavor. This understanding is paramount for the identification of the original description of TPS.<sup>26</sup>

Livy constructed moral episodes that defined the characters of principal figures.<sup>27</sup> We can employ the same reasoning in searching for TPS in differing places and times. If we can locate principle players with obvious dark emotions, we will find TPS, especially with individuals described by the likes of Livy.

### Setup

Two accounts in particular influenced the tall poppy story later depicted by Livy. In the fifth century BC, the Greek historian Herodotus described the following in *The Histories*: Thrasybulus walks through a field of wheat with Periander's messenger, silently cutting off the tallest heads to demonstrate the elimination of opponents. A century later, Aristotle wrote *Politics*, wherein he reversed the roles of the two leaders in the story.<sup>28</sup> (See chapter 5 for the full stories.) Although poppies were not mentioned in either account, the concept of cutting down those who are a threat would evolve into the poppy story of ancient Rome.

### Rise of Tarquin the Proud

Livy explained history through representative individuals and human characters. I have pointed out the dark emotions in these accounts. Each of them can play a role in TPS.

Livy's *History of Rome* began with the earliest period, the Roman Kingdom. The city and surrounding areas were ruled by kings with a personally selected, powerless senate. Our interest begins with the fourth of seven kings, Ancus Marcius (642–616 BC). Toward the end of his reign, his right-hand man and guardian of his children sent the two sons on a hunting trip. In their absence and with the king's failing health, the man called a special election and won. Out of envy, Tarquinius tall poppied the king and his sons simultaneously.

This fifth king, L. Tarquinius Priscus (616–579 BC), had a daughter and two sons: Tarquin and Arruns. His wife persuaded him to take in Servius, the son of a slave woman. When the time came for his daughter's marriage, Tarquinius betrothed her to Servius.

Meanwhile, Ancus's sons bitterly resented Tarquinius for stealing the throne. In time, they had him assassinated (tall poppied) in revenge for betraying them and their father. They did not obtain the rule of Rome, however. To their dismay, Servius claimed the throne and forced them into exile.

Servius Tullius (578–535 BC), the sixth king, had two daughters. To prevent Tarquin and Arruns from plotting an assassination like their father's (resentment, revenge), he arranged for them to become his sons-in-law. His ploy failed miserably. The spousal envy among the couples resulted in the murders (TPS) of Arruns and the daughter married to Tarquin.

Widower and widow, Tarquin and Tullia married. She approved, encouraged, and enabled his dark emotions. Eventually, he openly maligned and vilified her father, the king, by then an old man.

The envious Tarquin claimed Servius was not the rightful king and had usurped the throne. Then he had Servius killed (tall poppied), likely at Tullia's suggestion. Her heart laden with dark emotions and her mind deranged over the killing of her husband and sister, she drove her carriage over her father's body and continued home wearing his blood.

This reign was hatched by, secured with, and acted as a purveyor of dark emotions. Surely, the Roman god Mars must have taken note of all this aggression.

Tarquin the Proud—Lucius Tarquinius Superbus (535–509 BC)—was the seventh and final king of Rome, and with an appropriate moniker (pride). He began with the execution of senators (tall poppied) who did not support him. Since the people had not elected him nor

the senate sanctioned him, he ruled by fear and in fear—a bodyguard at all times. He was the sole decision maker but gained some support with the Latins by marrying his daughter to one of their nobles.

Tarquin was a capable soldier and scored many conquests (tall poppy). When the neighboring town of Gabii matched his military might, he resorted to his other strengths: deceit and treachery. He dispatched his son Sextus to Gabii under the ruse of an abused son escaping a cruel father. The leaders gradually accepted him and admitted him to powerful councils, confident his cooperation would shift the warfare from their gates to Rome's walls.

With his mission accomplished, Sextus was uncertain about his next move.

### **Tall Poppy Metaphor**

In Livy's version of the Periander story, Sextus sends a confidential messenger to his father, inquiring about the next scheme. Tarquin cannot ascertain the legitimacy of the go-between and speaks not a word. He wanders about the garden with a stick, knocking off the heads of the taller poppies. Once the field of poppies is uniform, he returns to his business. Frustrated by Tarquin's silence, the messenger returns to Gabii and thinks he has failed. He reports his encounter to Sextus, who recognizes the next step: remove all the influential men of Gabii—thus, the Tall Poppy Syndrome metaphor was born. Sextus cuts down his tall poppies, and Gabii falls to Tarquin without a fight.

### **Reaping the Whirlwind**

Sextus joined Tarquin's military forces and continued his egregious behaviors, even raping an officer's wife. When she committed suicide afterward, her friend Brutus, the king's nephew, vowed revenge. He also knew Tarquin had murdered many aristocrats. Brutus had been hiding his true identity behind a mask, but he could stomach no more tyranny, or kings (a **Rubicon moment**—see chapter 5).

He had the woman's body carried to the public square, and a crowd gathered. The scene generated sympathy for her family and fury toward Sextus, so igniting a flame of rebellion would be easy. Brutus removed his mask and railed against Sextus for the rape, against Tarquin for killing Servius, and against Tullia for driving over her father's body.

The crowd demanded the king's removal, and a revolution began. Tarquin and two of his sons were forced into exile. Tullia wandered, never escaping the vengeance for killing her sister and desecrating her father's corpse. Sextus sought a home in Gabii, but the people there assassinated him (revenge). Brutus and the dead woman's husband were elected among the first consuls, and the Roman Republic began.

The Roman Kingdom had lasted 244 years. The new republic would last five hundred, then give way to the Roman Empire. A contemporary of Herodotus, Thucydides contended that human nature is constant and predictable. A like individual will do what his predecessor did centuries earlier.

Characters displayed the same dark emotions at the end of the republic as at the beginning. Thucydides was prescient and validated.<sup>29</sup> History has repeated itself in the past and will do so in the future. Characters act the same way, even if separated by five hundred years.

## Conclusion

This chapter provided an extended definition of TPS to round out your understanding, perhaps more information than required to recognize it. Medical school was like that—jammed with the study of diseases, germ theory, and research. When I finally began my practice, the office was full of runny noses, respiratory infections, influenza, and ankle sprains instead. Although TPS might occur in any number of ways, you will most likely encounter envy-triggered TPS in your neighborhood, child's school, or office. Do not waste your time looking for zebras unless you are on the Serengeti. Once you understand the basic entity, the more complex will open, just as the syndrome in full bloom.

The Tall Poppy Syndrome is fueled by dark emotions, as demonstrated in Livy's writings. The next chapter will explore the most common emotions involved in TPS.

# Chapter 2 - Envy, Resentment, Schadenfreude, and Jealousy

WHENEVER A FRIEND SUCCEEDS,  
A LITTLE SOMETHING DIES IN ME.

—GORE VIDAL

Envy plays a central role in the Tall Poppy Syndrome. Other emotions are involved, but not as dominantly. The syndrome gains complexity by recruiting various emotions to become as dark as a deadly sin. Examining the anatomy of emotions facilitates our understanding and diagnosis of TPS.

Since politics has such a prominent role in American TPS, pay particular attention to these emotions so you understand what is going on. Demagogues play to emotions skillfully. Purveyors of social justice, who call for taking from the superior and distributing to the inferior, play into them, as well, especially envy.

## Anatomy of Emotions

**Emotions** are impulses to act that emanate from the “heart,” the feeling mind located in the brainstem, the most primitive part of the brain. Other layers of the brain affect emotions, too, including the limbus and neocortex, the distinctly human thinking section.<sup>30</sup>

In much of the animal kingdom, emotions are basic, but in man they are intricate mental activities—often intense, of pleasure or displeasure, prompting motivation. The complexity of human emotions involves:

- cognition: mental processing, which also involves beliefs and mindsets

- physiology: sweating, increased pulse rate and respiration, and muscle tension
- subjective experience: sensations and feelings based on past observations and occurrences
- expressive behavior: fight or flight, which is mediated by nervous system physiology that includes increases in hormone levels

Basic, primary emotions can change with cultural conditioning and associations. When previous emotional experiences are also involved, we experience a range of feelings and motivations, just as primary colors produce unlimited color variations when mixed.<sup>31</sup>

## **Envy – Bad and Good**

Aptly described by W. Gerrod Parrott and Richard Smith in 1993: “Envy occurs when a person lacks another’s superior quality, achievement, or possession and either desires it or wishes that the other lacks it.”<sup>32</sup> Envy is usually characterized by feelings of inferiority, longing, resentment, and disapproval. However, this complex emotion can be experienced in other ways, also, as indicated in this list quoted from Parrott:

- longing: a longing for what another person has; frustrated desire
- inferiority: anxiety, sadness, or distress over one’s shortcomings; feeling inferior to an envied person; despair over ever obtaining what an envied person has
- agent-focused resentment: resentment of a specific person or group; displeasure over another’s superiority; anger and hatred of those deemed responsible
- global resentment: resentment of the unfairness of circumstances or fate
- guilt: guilt over ill will; belief that rancor is wrong; “enlightened malicious envy” (i.e., recognition of malicious envy in oneself)
- admiration: emulation

Envy commonly consists of any combination of these. Inferiority and admiration are the most frequent combination when resentment is absent. Admiration and resentment are an uncommon combination.

Blame determines the nature of an envier's experience/response—whether we think we are unfairly treated versus deserving of our disadvantage. If our feelings of inferiority are deserved, we will likely be motivated to improve; if they are unfair, anger and resentment will result.<sup>33</sup>

Envy gained notoriety in a list of transgressions compiled in the fourth century by monk Evagrius Ponticus and later by monk John Cassian. The lists were a template for the monk's life of celibacy and continued to change for a couple of centuries. Pope Gregory the Great penned the final list—the seven deadly sins—in his book *Morals on the Book of Job* in AD 590. He included the Catholic Church's virtues as a means to counteract each deadly sin:

- lust—chastity
- gluttony—temperance
- greed—charity
- sloth—diligence
- anger/wrath—patience
- envy—kindness
- pride—humility<sup>34</sup>

Although envy is normally considered undesirable, Aristotle distinguished a different type: emulation motivated people to improve themselves versus being motivated to take away things. Psychologists today have divided envy into various types but mostly to signify good and bad envy, or benign and malicious (also called malignant).

Good envy leads a person to admire others' good qualities and seek to be like them. Malicious envy is not wanting people to possess what they have and desiring to cut them down (TPS) so the envier looks better by comparison. The point is to denigrate the person. This can overlap anger, and the distinction relies on justification and social standards. If the superiority of the envied is not "deserved," we might consider our anger to be righteous indignation. If the advantage is deserved, our anger is not appropriate and is labeled malicious envy.

**Benign envy** pulls the envier up, while **malicious envy** pulls the envied down. For example, desiring what another possesses entails benign envy if we seek to earn that for ourselves, but malicious envy is when we resent the other person for having it.<sup>35</sup>

Some languages have two words for envy. In Dutch, envy translates as *afgunst* and *benijden*. The first refers to malicious envy, the

second to a brighter, constructive form. Russia has one word for envy but refers to “white” and “black” envy when describing its constructive versus destructive nature.<sup>36</sup>

The most common envy among peers is when a lack of others’ worthier qualities, accomplishments, or possessions reflects poorly on the envier. The more people envy, the more they wallow in self-pity. They could wish others would lose those things and may even want to steal them. Or enviers may wish some other misfortune for those people.

Our associations with others can contribute to envy. A discrepancy with someone in the same social circle sometimes creates envy because we want to be as successful as others in our group, even if we don’t know them personally. Yet the success of a stranger elsewhere may not elicit our envy because it does not reflect badly on us.

Social comparison has three options: upward, downward, and sideways. Envy usually concerns upward comparison. Upward envy occurs when we compare ourselves with another’s prowess, expertise, and possessions and deem them attainable. We naturally make subconscious comparisons as soon as we meet others, and the discovery that they are better off in some area causes heartache. If this motivates us to improve our situations, we have experienced good envy. For example, good envy is beneficial when we compare ourselves with experts. We can adjust with upward expectations when role modeling provides ongoing inspiration and motivation.

Once we achieve a desired goal relative to someone else (say, buying a new home), we are better off to compare sideways or even downward thereafter. For example, downward comparison is used by a mother to boost her child’s self-esteem: “There is always someone worse off than you.” As children mature, however, sideways comparisons can make them feel better about themselves and upward comparisons may encourage self-improvement.

To evaluate good envy, many studies have exposed participants to higher-quality people. Most participants—especially those with a good self-image—compared themselves with the higher-quality people. If those people were positive and intelligent, the participants elevated their own attitudes, personalities, hopes, and sense of intelligence. But when also comparing down to lower-quality people, participants accepted their own inferiority to those above them.

Tests regarding creativity found that the groups who compared up were more creative and improved their scores. Overall, upward comparison can make us smarter and more creative, but we must pick the correct role model: Observation of proficient people allows you to learn skills. Exposure to successful people gives us confidence that we can become effective. Envy of a role model provides motivation.<sup>37</sup>

Envy continues to evolve, and psychologists say much of it is malicious. The media and internet document it extensively as well. Facebook is rife with envy, and cyberbullying has become commonplace, wielding forces significant enough to make suicide the only escape for some victims. Researchers have found that the more people use Facebook, the less happy they are with their lives—bad envy. Two large German studies of nearly six hundred total Facebook users found rampant envy among them.<sup>38</sup>

The politics of envy has been around since tribal times. In his book *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior*, Helmut Schoeck devoted a full chapter to “Politics and the Appeasement of Envy.” He noted that the more individuals and governments act as if envy does not exist, the greater the economic growth and innovation. The progressive left supports a wealth tax, but it could also be labeled an envy tax,<sup>39</sup> a bad one at that.

Gore Vidal stated: “Envy is the central fact of American life.”<sup>40</sup> If this is true, TPS must be a close second.

The following epic American tale includes all envy except good and enlightened malicious envy—the first does not end in TPS, and the second requires acknowledgment of guilt. The two men’s envy begins with birthrights, social class, education, competition, and rivalry. It does not end there because the stakes are so high. Which tall poppy will be the first to reach the top? If the journey is too long, resentment and anger are certain to follow. If their emotions take on lives of their own, things cannot end well. Who will be tall poppied?

### **Tall Poppied by Envy: The Bone Wars**

In 1804 explorers found evidence of a dinosaur bone along the Yellowstone River but considered it part of a fish. Further signs of dinosaur bones emerged in Connecticut in 1818 but were believed to belong to humans. The significance of these types of findings began to materialize in England. By 1841 Richard Owen proposed such bones

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be called Dinosauria. Circa midcentury, researchers determined a whole group of reptiles had vanished from the earth.<sup>41</sup>

Large numbers of fossils existed in the American West but could not be recovered because they were in hostile Indian territory. Transportation was lacking as well. Once the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, fossil hunting began in earnest.<sup>42</sup>

**Othniel Charles Marsh** was born into a modest family on October 29, 1831. His wealthy uncle, banker and philanthropist George Peabody, provided support for his education and beyond. Marsh graduated from Yale, pursued further studies in Europe, and returned to Yale as a professor of paleontology in 1886. At his suggestion, the Peabody Museum of Natural History began with a donation from his uncle the same year.<sup>43</sup>

**Edward Drinker Cope** was born on July 28, 1840, into a wealthy Quaker family. He received little formal training but was a child prodigy in science, publishing his first paper at nineteen. He eventually convinced his father to allow him to study natural history at the University of Pennsylvania. Like Marsh, he furthered his studies in Europe, although some said it was to avoid being drafted into the Civil War. Upon his return in 1864, he became a professor of zoology at Haverford College, a small Quaker school. His family's philanthropic ties assisted in his being hiring and receiving an honorary master's degree, a requirement for the post.<sup>44</sup>

A PBS article documented the relationship between Marsh and Cope. They met in Europe during their studies and became friends. That was short-lived once they returned home. Cope quit his teaching post after a couple of years to move to Haddonfield, New Jersey, to be closer to fossil beds and spend more time exploring and less teaching. Here Cope introduced his friend Marsh to a marl pit owner at the site. Marsh bribed the owner to transfer fossils to him at New Haven, sparking a feud that led to the Bone Wars (also known as the Great Dinosaur Rush).

Thereafter, Marsh was examining one of Cope's fossil finds, a complete skeleton of a large aquatic plesiosaur, when he detected the head was on the tail. Having already published a paper on the fossil, Cope tried to buy up copies of the article. The cover-up was exposed and gained momentum when he refused to admit his mistake. The feud burst into a blaze, and the two would never speak amicably again.

By the early 1870s, their competition to be America's greatest paleontologist fanned their feud into an inferno as it moved west. Their pursuit of fossils had taken on the brutal mindset of gold diggers or robber barons. Marsh bribed landowners to obtain the best fossils, while Cope poached them. Both men spied on and sabotaged each other's diggings, attacked each other's scientific findings, bid against each other on collections, and attempted to hijack each other's helpers.

Their biggest attacks against each other involved John Wesley Powell. Both wanted him for their geological surveys, but Marsh had contacts and became chief paleontologist of the newly formed United States Geological Survey (USGS). The conflict then became Cope against Powell and Marsh. Cope kept an elaborate journal of their misdeeds and mistakes: their financial mismanagement, including underpaying staff and misspending funds, plus scientific, geological, and publishing errors.

Marsh and his allies in the USGS were publicly accused of corruption, incompetence, and misuse of government funds. Congress investigated and eventually slashed funding for the Survey, eliminating its department of paleontology along with Marsh's position, power, and most of his income. The Smithsonian demanded he turn over a large part of his fossil collection, some of which had been collected with government funds. Marsh had been tall popped.

Cope did not fare so well himself. By 1880 he was living in a small Philadelphia apartment, separated from his wife, and broke. All he had was his collection. He had to turn in specimens he unearthed during his time with the government surveys even though he paid his own way and did his own digging. He had a teaching position at the University of Pennsylvania, but his relationship soured with the university president, whose influence then resulted in the loss of all funding for paleontology within the USGS.

Cope published over fourteen hundred scientific papers, although some findings are suspect. He discovered one thousand species of vertebrates, including fifty-six dinosaur species. His father, and the inheritance he left Cope, financed his pursuits. Yet that was not enough to support his ego and explorations, which nearly bankrupted him and forced him to sell a large amount of his collection, part going to the American Museum of Natural History for only \$32,000. In 1897 he became ill and died at age fifty-six.

Many felt he had more brains, but Marsh had more connections. Although older, he outlived Cope and found eighty new species of dinosaur bones, including the first fossil skeleton of *Brontosaurus*. Parts of his vast collection were the original core of the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History. In 1899 he died at age sixty-seven with only \$189 in the bank.

But declaring a winner is difficult, as both appear to have been losers. Theirs was a tale of envy, anger, resentment, and vengeance; their lives filled with deceit, cheating, crime, wasted time and money, and misdirected energies devoid of virtue. Each could claim victory by tall poppying the other but lost the war in doing so.<sup>45</sup>

Times change but not men. In Liaoning Province, a discovery of pterosaurs (“winged dragons”) placed China in the vanguard of fossil hunting. Reminiscences of the Wild West emerged: entrepreneurial farmers digging and collecting; commercial collectors purchasing premier pieces, only to illegally resell them internationally; and dueling scientists.<sup>46</sup>

By 2001 Junchang Lü, of the Chinese Academy of Geological Sciences and the director of the Jinzhou Paleontological Museum, was pitted against Xiaolin Wang of the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology in Beijing. Once friends, they became antagonists. Their sixteen years of brinkmanship produced almost one-fourth of all known pterosaurs (more than fifty). In October 2018, fifty-three-year-old Junchang Lü died of a heart attack. He will be remembered as a leading dinosaur researcher of the past half-century.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps both were using good envy and made each other a better person and researcher.

## **Resentment and Ressentiment**

Resentment may be simple but is also a complex emotion, as the following definitions show:

- Merriam-Webster: “a feeling of indignant displeasure or persistent ill will at something regarded as a wrong, insult, or injury”
- Cambridge: “a feeling of anger because you have been forced to accept something that you do not like”<sup>48</sup>

Both definitions have to do with justice, which immediately shows the potential for cutting someone down for a wrong.

Sources of resentment under “forced to accept something you do not like” include envy, jealousy, unrecognized achievements, public humiliation, being taken advantage of, and being an object of discrimination. The last is the one most likely to give rise to movements, a large source of cutting because, individually, the victims cannot change their circumstances. While movements are often good and cut down egregious poppies, they also cause collateral damage.<sup>49</sup>

Resentment is mostly associated with the discontent of malicious envy, pushing the envy inward and onward into another deadly sin: anger. When resentment becomes pathologic and persistent, extreme cases are designated *ressentiment*, a more recent term. Ressentiment integrates into people’s personalities as a permanent characteristic. Hence, victims can become poisoned with envy. After escalating to ressentiment, they not only blame others for making them miserable but feel justified in cutting them down.<sup>50</sup>

The philosophies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries developed into the concept of ressentiment. During the Age of Enlightenment, people broke away from rulers, and this gave way to the individual; people wanted rights but still held collective interests. Egalitarians followed but wanted to prevent selfishness, which was certain to follow after individualism; they wanted all people to be equal. The idea of the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people satisfied both capitalists and socialists. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) noted people were driven by self-interest and not the collective. Envy, jealousy, discrimination, and prejudice came as a result and ended in ressentiment. Ressentiment was more than a word; it was a cultural-societal context of envy, humiliation, and powerlessness against the rise of a secular society based on merit.<sup>51</sup>

Nietzsche’s (1844–1900) writings about resentment aided recognition of ressentiment, the main theme of his book *On the Genealogy of Morals*. He felt the cause of resentment is a desire to distract oneself from a hidden tormenting pain that is less and less bearable, then blame someone else for the lousy feeling. Passive resentment involves frustration and impotence, while the active side is vengeance and envy. The transfer of responsibility for one’s misery or failure onto another recasts those who govern—bosses, fathers, neighbors, society—into evil people, thus relieving one’s regrets.<sup>52</sup>

In 1913 Max Scheler wrote: “Ressentiment is a self-poisoning of the mind which has quite definite causes and consequences. It is a lasting mental attitude, caused by the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects which, as such are normal components of human nature. Their repression leads to the constant tendency to indulge in certain kinds of value delusions and corresponding value judgments. The emotions and affects primarily concerned are revenge, hatred, malice, envy, the impulse to detract, and spite.” He believed ressentiment was a modern phenomenon promulgated as equality and individualism spread. Social equality occurred between individuals but in conjunction with imbalances in education, income, status, power, and property ownership.<sup>53</sup>

Contrasts between what is equal and what is not lead to envy. When people’s situations are not acceptable, cannot be changed, and cannot be forgotten, they may feel impotent and downward compare to negate or degrade the things they cannot acquire. Impotence is key, and envy will end in ressentiment when a person accepts the inability to do anything about the situation.

## **Tall Poppied by Ressentiment**

**James T. Hodgkinson** lived much of his adult life in Belleville, Illinois, a town of forty thousand people not far from Saint Louis. He and his wife of thirty years, desiring children but unable to conceive, spent years as foster parents.

Some of their foster children’s behaviors gave disturbing insight into Mr. Hodgkinson’s nature and foreshadowed his final days. One of his foster daughters committed suicide by pouring gasoline on herself, then setting it ablaze. Another described herself as more of a hindrance than a daughter. Hodgkinson dragged one grandniece by her hair; later he was discovered choking her, and the police charged him with battery.<sup>54</sup>

Hodgkinson became a Bernie Sanders supporter as well as a tax-the-rich and anti-Trump-and-Republican fanatic. In 2016 he was flabbergasted with the political environment. At the end of March 2017, he fired rounds from a hunting rifle into some neighborhood trees. After moving to Washington, DC, he lived out of a white cargo van for a few months in the Del Ray community, where a storage unit housed his ammunition and components for his rifle. He spent weeks

in a YMCA lobby in Alexandria, never working out but carrying a gym bag and studying his computer. From there he could observe a practice field where a congressional baseball team practiced daily.<sup>55</sup>

On June 14, 2017, after determining the players were Republicans, he fired dozens of rounds at them, wounding five people, including Representative Steve Scalise of Louisiana. Police intervened and shot Hodgkinson dead. He was not known to have a mental illness, but he did have anger-management issues, and the fuel for his rage, anger, and ressentiment was politics.<sup>56</sup> His hatred for political opposites had led him into the worst kind of TPS: brutal violence. In the end, he was cut down himself, a casualty of his ressentiment.

Mr. Hodgkinson's story shows the need for a new list of deadly sins. Envy, rage, anger, hate, and resentment are as dark as any black hole. He must have seen no light at the end of his tunnel, his self-esteem in negative territory. He represents what is a modern phenomenon in America, yet Nietzsche and Scheler described ressentiment over a century ago. Perhaps Hodgkinson belongs on the list of suspected suicides that are part of police shootings, drug overdoses, and car accidents. This is TPS as tragedy.

## Schadenfreude

“Your gain is my pain.” = envy  
 “Your pain is my gain.” = schadenfreude<sup>57</sup>

When I read Richard H. Smith's *The Joy of Pain: Schadenfreude and the Dark Side of Human Nature*, I sometimes thought he was describing the Tall Poppy Syndrome, but the phrase was never mentioned. *Schadenfreude* is a German compound noun: *Schaden* (harm or damage) plus *Freude* (joy)—the German language is notorious for combining words to make a new meaning. When one person experiences failure or misfortune leading to a negative emotion (humiliation, shame), someone else experiences a positive emotion (pleasure, self-satisfaction).<sup>58</sup>

Although most Americans did not know schadenfreude by that name, they experienced it at the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011 at the hands of a US military special operations unit. By Middle Eastern standards, bin Laden was a tall poppy—born into a billionaire family in Saudi Arabia, father of Al-Qaeda. The group's war against the

United States reached a peak with the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.<sup>59</sup> Ten years later, his death brought a collective sigh of relief to America—schadenfreude.

This concept is more universally understood than the TPS metaphor, and many languages have similar words for it. Early philosophers often included aspects of schadenfreude in their definitions of envy. Ancient words included *epichairekakia* (Greek, *epi* [over] + *chairo* [rejoice] + *kakia* [disgrace]) and *malvolentia* (Latin, *mal* [bad] + *volentia* [please]). More words from around the world:

- French – *maligne* (*male* [poorly] + *gignere* [beget])
- Danish – *skadefryd* (*skade* [damage] + *fryd* [joy])
- Dutch – *leedvermaak* (*leedver* [sorrow] + *maak* [make])
- Hebrew – *simcha la-ed* (*simbah* [rejoicing] + *laed* [sorry])
- Russian – *zloradstvo* (gloat)
- Mandarin – *xìng-zāi-lè-huò* (take joy in calamity and delight in disaster)
- Japanese – *Tanin no fukō wa hachimitsu no aji*. (The misfortune of others tastes like honey.)<sup>60</sup>

People who obtain pleasure at the pain of others usually harbor some level of envy that led up to the schadenfreude. When bad envy plus another's misfortune equals joy, two wrongs haven't necessarily made a right. Because human nature recognizes envy is normally a bad emotion, people may experience a little guilt along with their joy. However, the more the misfortune is justified, the less the guilt. If the misfortune is not justified, perhaps empathy should replace schadenfreude.<sup>61</sup>

The joyful person who has not actively cut down the fallen does not need to feel guilty for experiencing pleasure. In TPS even the cutter often experiences schadenfreude without guilt if deservingness is involved. The antidote/virtue for envy is gratitude, which prevents the existence of envy or acting in response to envy. If misfortune has already occurred, empathy might be the antidote, especially if the misfortune was not justified.<sup>62</sup>

Schadenfreude is commonly observed in people with low self-esteem and governed by a combination of envy and hostility. Their enjoyment regarding the downfall of peers is universal. And the misfortunes of nonpeers who are undeserving of their advantages or

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possess undesirable characteristics, as well, lift an envier's self-esteem or sense of justice. Schadenfreude has been called a sport in Germany and Australia.<sup>63</sup>

Psychologists in the US have published little regarding TPS and only a few articles concern schadenfreude. This is not surprising since neither is part of our culture or lexicon. However, a large amount of international scientific literature addresses TPS's schadenfreude, envy, and deservingness.

A study from Amsterdam in 2006 used envy to predict schadenfreude. Envy need not be present to make a diagnosis of TPS or schadenfreude but often is. Other factors are important, such as hostile feelings, degree of connection, similarity of life circumstances, gender, attributes, and deservingness. However, studies have shown that incorporating hostile feelings with envy can predict schadenfreude.

The Amsterdam study found that envy and hostile feelings contributed to schadenfreude, but envy predicted schadenfreude if there were similarities between the envier and the target. Also, envy did not predict schadenfreude if the target was a different gender.

Hostility, envy, and male gender predicted malicious schadenfreude when a similarity existed between the envier and the target, but not as much if the target was dissimilar, such as having low income or exorbitant income or being of the opposite gender. However, practically anyone can enjoy benign schadenfreude without knowing anything about the target.<sup>64</sup>

The prestigious *Science* journal published a premier article from Japan in 2009. Study participants read information about a target person and his or her possessions. When the target's possessions were superior and participants considered this person's life status comparable to theirs, or self-relevant, participants experienced greater envy and vice versa. MRIs of participants' brains at that moment revealed stronger brain activity in the area associated with empathy, ethics, impulse control, and morality.

In the second part of the study, when the envied person experienced misfortunes, participants exhibited schadenfreude and heightened activity in the brain area dealing with reward processing, just as the first part of the study had predicted. In the end, this study revealed the mechanisms of painful emotions such as envy and of reward reactions such as schadenfreude.<sup>65</sup>

The entertainment industry, Hollywood, and high-profile athletes make up many of the targets of TPS and schadenfreude in the US. Joseph Epstein, author of *Envy: The Seven Deadly Sins*, once referenced Cary Grant's statement that people do not like beautiful people. Epstein said, "Grant's assertion is borne out by our grocery press, *The National Enquirer*, *The Star*, *The Globe*, and other variants of the English gutter press. All these tabloids could as easily travel under the generic title of the *National Schadenfreude*, for more than half of the stories they contain come under the category of 'See How the Mighty Have Fallen.'"<sup>66</sup> Epstein could have been talking about schadenfreude, TPS, or both.

### **Tall Poppied, Then Schadenfreude**

Operation Varsity Blues was the code name for the FBI's inquiry into the criminal conspiracy to influence undergraduate admissions at premier universities. The FBI was investigating a pump-and-dump scheme and securities fraud. In April 2018, the person under investigation told investigators his alma mater's head women's soccer coach sought money from him to assist the admission of his daughter to their school. The person of interest agreed to plead guilty to the securities case and cooperate with the investigation for a reduced sentence.<sup>67</sup>

In 2019 federal prosecutors charged fifty-two people with conspiracy to commit felony mail fraud, money laundering, and honest services mail fraud. Other charges would later be added to people, such as trying to bribe college programs that receive federal money. The ringleader, William Rick Singer, was paid to obtain admissions to these schools through monetary incentives to coaches, athletic staff, and admissions testing officers. Parents donated to Singer's foundation, which allowed them to deduct the amounts from their taxes. Maximum charges could result in twenty years in prison, three years of supervised release, and a \$250,000 fine.<sup>68</sup>

*Hoge bomen vangen veel wind*, or "The tall trees catch all the wind." Lori Loughlin of Hallmark fame and actress Felicity Huffman have been poster children for the scheme. (Ironically, Huffman played Linda Fairstein, the New York City (NYC) prosecutor in Netflix's *When They See Us*. After the miniseries, Fairstein was tall poppied due to the film's negative portrayal of her.)<sup>69</sup>

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Tall poppy Jane Buckingham is the founder and owner of the marketing firm Trendera. She is also the author of the Modern Girl's Guides book series which includes *The Modern Girl's Guide to Motherhood* (2006) regarding strategies for the phases of motherhood. She hosted the television series *The Modern Girl's Guide to Life* for four years.<sup>70</sup>

Buckingham lives in Los Angeles with her son, Jack, and daughter, Lila. In 2017 she hired Rick Singer to counsel her son. He arranged for Jack to take the American College Test (ACT) in Houston, but Jack became ill and could not go. Singer and Buckingham agreed to hire a proctor to take the test for him. She provided Singer a sample of Jack's handwriting and also had Jack take the test at home as a cover-up. After divorcing her husband in 2018, she unwittingly tried to get him to pay for some of Singer's actions.<sup>71</sup>

In October 2019, Singer, author of Modern Girl guides about parenting and getting out of sticky situations, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit fraud and paying \$50,000 for a proctor to take the ACT for her son. Her fear that he was not going to be selected for an elite college (social-comparison envy) was the source of her egregious behavior. She had intended to do the same for her daughter, but her indictment prevented that crime. She was sentenced to three weeks in prison.<sup>72</sup>

The public is not empathetic or forgiving for bad behavior by the rich and famous. The taller they are, the farther and harder they fall. Some have drifted so far from their source—of truth, goodness, wisdom—that they begin to think they are the Source.

In "Free Lori Loughlin," an op-ed for the *Wall Street Journal*, William McGurn stated: "Meanwhile, in the same way the sans-culottes jeered Marie Antoinette on her way to the guillotine, today's equivalent—Twitter mobs and gossip sheets—are thirsting to see this icon of Tinseltown wealth and privilege cut down to size by a stint in federal prison."<sup>73</sup> The public's distaste for too-too was clear. He was describing TPS and schadenfreude, although he did not name them.

But not to worry, Willa Paskin did not let this scandal go to waste. Her article "The Dark Joy of 'Operation Varsity Blues': Why a Scandal So Powerfully Representative of Our National Dysfunction Has Also Been So Much Fun" pinned the tail squarely on the donkeys' rear ends.<sup>74</sup>

If Americans knew and understood the behaviors of cutters, **cuttees**, and even ourselves, we might experience less division, less hubris, and more empathy.

## **Jealousy versus Envy**

JEALOUSY IS NOT A BAROMETER BY WHICH THE DEPTH OF LOVE CAN BE READ, IT MERELY RECORDS THE DEGREE OF THE LOVER'S INSECURITY.

—MARGARET MEAD

People often confuse *envy* with *jealousy* because both are complex emotions regarding ownership. Jealous people fear losing what is theirs or have already lost it—some only thought they owned it to begin with. But enviers want what other people have or want them to lose it. A husband might envy his wife's cooking skills but is jealous when she spends too much time with a neighbor, especially if that person is a man.<sup>75</sup>

According to vocabulary.com, envy requires two parties. Jealousy involves three parties—for example, a love triangle—or two people and a thing such as a time-consuming hobby. With jealousy, a challenger endangers a relevant relationship with another. The threat must involve a compromise or loss of a relationship due to a suspected rival.<sup>76</sup>

Although we immediately think of a love relationship for jealousy, many other types exist, including siblings, friends, students/teachers, employees/bosses, and so on. The basis of most jealousy is rejection, a loss of attention that affects the self-worth or identity of a person. The downward loss of self-worth is similar to that detected in envy.

Some component of envy is often involved in jealousy, especially in the context of relationships that affect one's self-concept, abetting the confusion between the two. For example, a husband is jealous of a rival who has captured his wife's attention but envious of that rival's traits. Situations like these are characterized by a fear of loss, distrust, anxiety, and anger, making jealousy a much broader emotion.

*Jealousy* and *envy* should not be used interchangeably. Comparison is always in play for people, which makes envy the emotion most often associated with TPS. On the other hand, jealous people have no

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problem trying to cut down the people they are losing or those who are gaining.<sup>77</sup>

In my scientific research, I found only one article regarding TPS and jealousy listed by google scholar. The article involved no third person and neither person lost anything, so the author was really describing envy, not jealousy. Jealousy may be a cause of TPS but is uncommon and has not been scientifically studied.

My observational research, also, revealed how easily envy and jealousy can be confused. Following is an excerpt from an interview of Arnold Schwarzenegger by Chris Kornelis for the *Wall Street Journal* in 2019.

KORNELIS. Jealousy is...

SCHWARZENEGGER. Earned. Pity, anyone can get, but only when you're great, when you do something fantastic, are people jealous of you.

[Schwarzenegger meant envy is earned as you work to emulate someone and improve yourself—develop into a TP. People become envious of you (not jealous) because of your improvement. On the other hand, with your self-improvement, some might now emulate you.]

KORNELIS. I don't get jealous...

SCHWARZENEGGER. I find inspiration in the people around me.

[Schwarzenegger used good envy, comparing himself to someone with better traits than he possessed, which stimulated self-improvement.]

KORNELIS. Sylvester Stallone inspired me to...

SCHWARZENEGGER. Get bigger muscles, to use bigger knives and bigger guns, to kill people more creatively in movies to make more at the box office. But it was not because of jealousy. We inspired each other and that's what drove us."<sup>78</sup>

Schwarzenegger could have chosen to use bad envy and cut down Stallone by saying he did not know how to act, which would have elevated his own status as an actor. Instead, he compared himself with Stallone and used good envy, the comparison emotion, to match or improve on Stallone. He attempted to become a better action hero, not Sir Laurence Olivier.

## Tall Poppied by Jealousy

**Eleanor of Aquitaine** (ca. 1122–1204) was a powerful and affluent woman (TP) in western Europe during the High Middle Ages. Aquitaine was a fiefdom in central, southern, and western France. When her father died in 1137, Eleanor became a duchess and the most eligible bride in Europe. The only problem was that the land had to remain independent until her oldest son became King of France and Duke of Aquitaine.<sup>79</sup>

King Louis VI moved swiftly to have his son marry Eleanor and secure most of France. Within a month of the marriage, Louis VI died and Louis VII became king. Everyone but Eleanor knew the marriage was doomed; she was a bombshell and he, a dud. The marriage produced two daughters but no male heirs.

In 1147 Louis joined the Second Crusade along with Emperor Conrad III of Germany. For unknown reasons, Eleanor elected to accompany Louis although she wanted him to assist Raymond of Poitiers, her uncle in Antioch, in his quest for Aleppo and Caesarea. After joining other European forces in Constantinople, the two kings suffered a major defeat. Conrad retreated to Constantinople, and Louis headed for Antioch, losing many men on the journey.

When Louis reached finally Antioch, sacking Aleppo was no longer feasible. He still believed in the crusade's original plan, however, and decided to join Conrad and Baldwin III of Jerusalem in an attack against Damascus.

When Eleanor requested to stay with Raymond, with whom she was allegedly having an affair, a violently jealous Louis placed her under house arrest and made her go with him to Jerusalem. (Some argue Raymond seduced Eleanor in revenge for Louis's lack of support for his military mission.)<sup>80</sup>

The attack on Damascus was a dismal failure. Broke, defeated, and jealous, Louis hastily returned to France in 1149 with Eleanor against her wish to return to Antioch. Raymond was killed that year in battle.<sup>81</sup>

The expedition was at great cost to Louis—financially, militarily, and emotionally (jealousy over Eleanor). The marriage was annulled in March 1152 when a clause came to light that they were too closely related for marriage. Eleanor's lands reverted to her ownership. William Congreve once wrote: “Heav’n has no rage like to hatred turn’d / Nor Hell a fury, like a woman scorn’d.” Two months after the

annulment, Eleanor married Louis's mortal enemy, the Count of Anjou—Duke of Normandy, future King Henry II of England, eleven years her senior, and the same king who would tall poppy Thomas Becket. She granted him the Duchy of Aquitaine, but her followers fought this and remained loyal to her. More jealous than ever, Louis questioned the legality of their marriage and immediately led an ineffective war against Henry and Eleanor. He was humiliated in defeat, which initiated a feud that would last for generations.<sup>82</sup>

Henry had five sons and three daughters over the next thirteen years. Four sons survived and eventually developed resentment against him—not only did he divide his dominions disparately, but he kept authority. This also caused envy and disagreements among his sons. And his infidelities took a toll on Eleanor, who now became the jealous spouse.<sup>83</sup>

In 1173 Henry's oldest son, Henry "the Young King," attempted to take control over the lands Henry had divvied up. This bold move was supported by an estranged Eleanor (angry and jealous), Louis VII (revengeful), his sons (resentful), and many others. The Conflict of 1173–1174 followed. Henry eventually squashed the revolt, then had Eleanor imprisoned for the next sixteen years out of revenge. When he died, their son Richard I freed her.<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

Emotions are the main drivers of TPS, and envy is the King who deserves an entire chapter. Resentment and schadenfreude are intimately involved with envy and may follow in its footsteps. Jealousy often has components of envy but is a separate Queen. Good may come from some of this—a touch of benign schadenfreude is a good antidote (we cannot call it a virtue) for a hard or difficult day at the office. The next chapter includes other emotions less commonly involved in TPS.

# Chapter 3 - Anger, Revenge, and Bullying

THIS IS CERTAIN, THAT A MAN THAT STUDIETH REVENGE  
KEEPES HIS WOUNDS GREEN, WHICH OTHERWISE WOULD  
HEAL AND DO WELL.

—FRANCIS BACON

Anger, like envy, is classified as a deadly sin with both positive and negative components. We can become angry when our goals are blocked by someone else. Then we must choose to take positive action and remove the blockage by improving ourselves or negative action through “justified” revenge or violence, cutting the person down via the Tall Poppy Syndrome. The negative response of TPS has contributed to anger’s infamy.

Bullying is a separate entity but has components of anger and revenge. Because of the actions associated with it, bullying is sometimes confused with TPS.

This chapter continues the theme of sources for TPS and differentiates these in a similar way to envy/jealousy.

## Anger

Anger is not an action although it may elicit one. A complex emotion, anger is usually grouped with negative emotions—sadness, fear, contempt, for example.

Triggered by negative events such as a provocation, hurt, or threat, anger commonly occurs when an obstacle blocks one of our objectives. Often, positive anger motivates us to overcome the blockage, which is why some call anger the “positive-negative emotion.”<sup>85</sup>

## Case Study: Positive Anger

All-star and tall poppy Steve Curry of the Golden State Warriors basketball team had eight turnovers in the second game of the 2017 NBA finals. The turnovers led to points for the Cleveland Cavaliers. Fortunately, the Warriors won anyway.

Curry could have fouled his opponents, externalizing negative anger. Instead, he was his own biggest critic and internalized his anger positively, which motivated him to be smarter and more focused on his ballhandling during the next games, and his turnovers decreased. (His team won the championship as well.) During the off-season, good envy then motivated him to practice and improve, replacing the anger, which had subsided.<sup>86</sup>

The mental state resulting from certain emotions—in Curry’s case, anger—produces an approach-avoidance effect. “Approach” focuses us on advancing toward goals, while “avoidance” disassociates us from particular adverse conditions.<sup>87</sup> The approach state of positive anger was Curry’s motivation for better ball handling.

Following a loss of money in the stock market, the approach state would focus on learning and following prudent investment rules. Most of us, however, would embrace the avoidance state and stay away from the market for fear of losing money again. This tendency gave rise to Warren Buffett’s oft-quoted adage “Be fearful when others are greedy and greedy when others are fearful.”<sup>88</sup>

Due to the release of hormones, angry people in the approach state have more energy, narrow their focus, and feel more in control, which inspires persistence, perseverance, and success. The avoidance state of fear has opposite effects.<sup>89</sup>

The cable TV series *Homeland* illustrates positive-approach anger beautifully. CIA agent Carrie Mathison, the protagonist, missed a clue to the 9/11 terrorist plot and could have saved thousands of lives. Angry with herself, she focuses on being the best agent she can, solving and foiling other terrorist plots.<sup>90</sup>

On the other hand, negative anger changes our behavior by distorting perception and rearranging reasoning.

### Case Study: Negative Anger

Highland Capital Management's founder, James Dondero, abruptly fired their most productive portfolio manager, tall poppy Josh Terry, in June 2016 after Terry opposed Dondero's scheme to delay repaying money owed to investors while transferring it between other Highland investment instruments. The company had essentially tall popped him. Highland's official position was that they dismissed Terry for acting against investor interests in a fund he managed and for having sexual relationships with several subordinates. An arbitration panel found Highland used the pretexts and false sexual allegations to fire Terry without paying him the millions of dollars it owed him.

"Dondero was simply angry and realized Terry was not a 'yes man' willing to let Dondero have his wrongheaded way," the panel established. Dondero's negative anger dictated his thinking. Viewing Terry as the source of his perceived problems, he had fired him.<sup>91</sup>

## Values and Anger

Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist from the University of Virginia, identified five moral values—harm, fairness, purity, in-group loyalty, and social hierarchy—which define cultures and form our political choices. He says these moral judgments are driven by emotions and intuition.

Politically, the Right identifies with all five moral values, which can give rise to divisions, conflicts, and feuds within their party. The Left identifies more with fairness, especially if harm or a violation of rights is involved, providing a more unified platform. If either of these

happens, anger follows, which results in cutting someone down if accompanied by action.

In the WEIRD (western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) societies of the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States, anger has moved beyond a deadly sin to one that motivates violence as an emotional gauge of justice. One's anger plus an action serves as a cutter for TPS; this is consistent with Feather's finding of the Left's identification with deservingness as a motivation for TPS. Of course, the Right performs cutting, as well, but for other reasons.<sup>92</sup>

## **Violence**

Like *envy* and *jealousy*, the terms *wrath* and *anger* are sometimes used interchangeably because anger, like wrath, is associated with violence, although not as assuredly. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines anger as “a strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism” and “rage.” Whereas wrath is “strong vengeful anger or indignation” and “retributory punishment for an offense or a crime.”<sup>93</sup>

Some philosophers believe anger cannot exist without a desire for retribution, but violence follows only 2–10 percent of anger, according to some estimates. Despite this low percentage, the association is part of our psyche, partly due to Hollywood films and media news clips showing things such as rioting and violent crimes. Yet anger is not necessarily a sufficient cause of violence and distinguishes itself from wrath’s more negative tone. When violence does follow anger, TPS is likely in play.<sup>94</sup>

## **Tall Poppied by Anger and Violence**

In the American Old West, cattlemen and sheep-herders mixed like oil and water because sheep grazed the landscape completely, leaving little for the cattle. This caused classic anger over a blocked goal. As these were unruly times, violence was going to follow, not a peace treaty.

The Pleasant Valley War of the early 1880s was a famous feud including the Tewksburys and Grahams in the territory of Arizona. The Tewksburys—original settlers, TPs, and cattlemen—invited the cattle-raising Grahams to be their neighbors. A third rancher arrived and caused a division between the friends, initiating a feud.

The Tewksburys turned to sheep ranching, and sheep ranchers sided with them; cattle ranchers sided with the Grahams, drawing the entire valley into the feud.

Anger turned into violence. By 1892 Tom Graham and Ed Tewksbury were still standing tall, but twenty to fifty men had met violent deaths. Tewksbury ambushed and killed (cut down) Graham. The last surviving man of the war, Tewksbury finally died in 1904. The chain of anger-induced violence was broken, and the land was set free.<sup>95</sup>

## **Revenge**

Although all emotions may be complex, revenge tops the list. A disturbing aspect of this negative emotion is that there is no positive side. To crawl out of the grave we are digging for ourselves (and the targets of our revenge), we would have to change course to forgiveness. Revenge tends to be layered with other unpleasant emotions, and their undesirable aspects only dig a deeper grave. Negative anger biases understanding, perception, and the interpretation of justice, the very facet we are trying to correct.

Just as we erroneously believe violence follows anger, satisfaction does not necessarily follow revenge. MRI studies have demonstrated revenge stimulates the reward area of the brain. However, clinical studies have shown that after revenge, dissatisfaction often persisted, which required mental, emotional, and physical activity and sometimes led to future retaliation. Closure never occurred, while contemplation, hostility, and anger remained at levels higher than experienced in those who never sought retribution. Energy and focus are best directed away from revenge.

Since harming others did not satisfy the vengeful state, additional studies sought answers and revealed the following:

Participants' concepts of justice were different from one another.

People who expressed their anger had higher levels of aggression than those who did nothing.

Satisfaction required knowing offenders had suffered as much pain as they had inflicted on others and that the offenders admitted their misbehavior.

For example, let us say a tall poppy has been cut down by a colleague and wants revenge. Unless the TP's revenge causes the cutter

comparable suffering and the cutter admits to the offense, the TP can never achieve satisfaction or closure. Revenge does not usually turn out that way. Achieving closure requires the emotional intelligence and self-awareness needed to move on or develop forgiveness. In doing so, we can avoid becoming avengers and the dissatisfaction that usually follows.<sup>96</sup>

The following case concerning Katie Hill demonstrates the level to which some people will stoop to exact revenge.

### **Tall Poppied by Revenge**

During the US midterm elections in November 2018, thirty-five seats were voted on for the Senate and all 435 seats in the House of Representatives. The Democrats gained forty-one seats in the House, becoming a majority for the first time since 2010. Many of the pickups were in areas that later gave Hillary Clinton a plurality in the 2016 presidential election.

Women achieved historic firsts in 2018. The new Congress consisted of 102 (23.7 percent) women—Democrats gaining twenty-five female seats, Republicans losing ten. In the House were now twenty female millennials, including Katie Hill.<sup>97</sup>

**Katie Hill** grew up in Agua Dulce, a town of thirty-three hundred people located in the high-desert country of northern Los Angeles County. Her mother was a nurse and her father a policeman. Around the time she graduated from high school, she declared herself bisexual. Hill attended California State University, Northridge, receiving a bachelor's degree in English and a Master of Public Administration.<sup>98</sup>

In July 2010, she married artist Kenny Heslep, whom she had dated since high school. They lived outside Agua Dulce on a ranch where they cared for rescued animals. She worked as a policy advocate at People Assisting the Homeless (PATH), rising rapidly through the ranks to become the executive director. The company soared with her and transformed from a local agency to an enormous nonprofit providing homes for the homeless in California. She championed Measure H, a \$1.2 billion ballot initiative to alleviate homelessness. Heslep worked for PATH from 2010 to 2014; thereafter he remained a stay-at-home husband.<sup>99</sup>

Hill ran as a Progressive for the House of Representatives although she supported some type of physical barrier at the southern border and

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owned a gun. Her campaign did not accept money from corporate political action committees, but she still raised over \$1 million. The Home Box Office show *Vice News Tonight* documented her campaign and called it “the most millennial campaign” for Congress. She defeated incumbent Republican Representative Steve Knight, garnering 54 percent of the votes.<sup>100</sup>

Hill was one of two freshman representatives for the Democratic Caucus and appointed to three committees and three caucus memberships. She had reached tallpoppydom and was now a public figure who would be held to a higher standard than Katie-Hill-from-Agua-Dulce. She seemed to sense it as well. In an interview with *Elle* magazine in June 2019, Hill shared a quote from Elijah Cummings, Chairman of the Committee on Oversight and Reform: “It [was] that our role on Oversight is to get to the truth and to follow the truth wherever it leads us and to expose that for the American people. To make sure that they have the information that they should have to, frankly, evaluate their government.”<sup>101</sup>

Heslep stayed home while Hill became bicoastal in early 2019. He filed for divorce in July 2019 after nearly a decade of marriage (fifteen years together) and sought financial support. She stopped speaking with or supporting him.

On October 10, the conservative blog *RedState* reported that Heslep (jealous) claimed Hill was having an extramarital affair with her former campaign finance manager, Graham Kelly, who was now her congressional legislative director. Hill’s office declined to comment at that time.<sup>102</sup>

On October 18, *RedState* detailed Hill’s 2017 relationship with an unnamed twenty-two-year-old female campaign staff member, which had segued into a three-way relationship including Heslep. They published photos of Hill, one nude, with someone other than Heslep and stated they had chosen not to publish additional intimate photos they held. Also, they disclosed text messages between the two women. The article added Heslep’s claim (jealousy with building anger) that numerous sources had informed him of Hill’s involvement in a sexual relationship with Graham Kelly while he was her finance director, which had continued now that he was her legislative director.<sup>103</sup>

On October 23, the House Ethics Committee opened an investigation into Hill’s potential wrongdoings. The House Code of Conduct states: “18.(a) A Member, Delegate, or Resident

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Commissioner may not engage in a sexual relationship with any employee of the House who works under the supervision of the Member, Delegate, or Resident Commissioner, or who is an employee of a committee on which the Member, Delegate, or Resident Commissioner serves.” In a tweet, Hill admitted to the campaign-staff affair and stated she would cooperate with Congress.<sup>104</sup>

On October 24, DailyMail.com, a British tabloid, reported a composite of stories by *RedState* and published explicit photographs of Hill, one nude while smoking a bong, an iron-cross tattoo on her bikini line.<sup>105</sup>

On October 27, she tweeted she was resigning from Congress (tall popped) and published her resignation letter. CBS News reported Nancy Pelosi as saying Hill had “some errors in judgment that made her continued service as a Member untenable. We must ensure a climate of integrity and dignity in the Congress, and in all workplaces.”

In a video presentation on October 28, a visibly angry Hill blamed her “abusive husband” and the brutality of “hateful” political operatives, vowed to fight the leaking of intimate photographs, and pledged a new fight on revenge porn, or cyber exploitation.<sup>106</sup>

On their website, the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI) defines revenge porn as follows:

The term “revenge porn,” though frequently used, is somewhat misleading. Many perpetrators—nearly 80% according to a 2017 nationwide CCRI study—are not motivated by revenge or by any personal feelings toward the victim. A more accurate term is nonconsensual pornography, defined as the distribution of sexually graphic images of individuals without their consent. This includes both images originally obtained without consent (e.g. by using hidden cameras, hacking phones, or recording sexual assaults) as well as images consensually obtained within the context of an intimate relationship.

Nonconsensual pornography transforms unwilling individuals into sexual entertainment for strangers. A vengeful ex-partner or opportunistic hacker can upload an explicit image of a victim to a website where thousands of people can view it and hundreds of other websites can share it.<sup>107</sup>

Katie Hill was a victim of the Tall Poppy Syndrome. She had gained political and social status, but her behavior was egregious. Her husband’s initial jealousy grew into negative anger, then revenge as he attempted to publicly embarrass her, verbally and otherwise. She was

also an unintended consequence of the #MeToo movement. Revenge porn, politics, and the press were the knives and scissors that finally cut her down.

### TPS and Gender

Gender adds a new dimension to TPS. Women in the meritocratic workplace hierarchy not only face competition but sexual harassment and discrimination. Yet another layer is added to this: women perceive this competition differently than men.<sup>108</sup> (See the study of Australian athletes in chapter 3.) I predict we will see an explosion of female TPS victims in the workplace.

## Bullying versus Tall Poppy Syndrome

Bullying is commonly confused with TPS but is a syndrome of its own. Although it may be part of the cutting mechanism, bullying does not cut down, people do. This phenomenon is everywhere and targets all types of people, not just TPs. Also, tall poppies may be bullied without being cut down.

Australian research sometimes confuses TPS with bullying. In a 2014 study of high-performance athletes, all of the female coeds stated they had been bullied. Although TPS is less frequent toward women than men, the study applied the words *bullying* and *TPS* interchangeably, just as many do with the words *envy* and *jealousy*. (Authors, the media, and scientists also consider *TPS* and *bullying* synonyms at times.)<sup>109</sup>

Bullying definitions should contain three minimum criteria:

- hostile intent
- imbalance of power (A real or perceived advantage of the bully's social or physical power must exist.)
- repetition over a period of time

Thus, bullying is the use of force, threat, or coercion to abuse, intimidate, or aggressively dominate others. It may be perpetrated by

one person or many, even a mob. Individual bullying sometimes injures another's reputation or social standing through cyber injury.<sup>110</sup>

School bullying is commonplace due to the power differentials between administrators, teachers, and students, as well as within each level. Victims may lack social skills; think negatively; come from negative families, schools, or community environments; and be rejected by peers. They may be physically weak and emotionally distressed—the complete opposite of a high-achieving TP. But brainy nerds are frequent targets, too, bullied by teachers or classmates compelled to maintain mediocrity when no one else will.<sup>111</sup>

Bullying is pervasive in the military, the epitome of organizational hierarchy, and military training. Their training techniques, such as intimidation, victimization, and illegitimate punishment, incorporate bullying.<sup>112</sup>

Workplace bullying is also common. Christine Porath's 2016 research at George Washington University's McDonough School of Business found two-thirds of Americans were bullied, according to her definition, at least once a month. This number has grown from 50 percent in 1998. Consequences of bullying include depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, despair, and psychosomatic or musculoskeletal complaints.<sup>113</sup>

A 2013 National Health Services (NHS) study published in the *British Medical Journal* found 20 percent of the NHS staff had been bullied by other staff members, and 43 percent had witnessed bullying within the last six months. Managers were a common source of bullying (hierarchy). Experiencing bullying and witnessing it were associated with decreased psychological health and job satisfaction, as well as a greater desire to leave the job.<sup>114</sup>

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission concluded in 2016 that power disparities, a leadership culture and accountability, and a large young workforce gave rise to bullying. Reasons for harassment were ethnicity, sex, race, disability, age, color, religion, pregnancy, and gender identity. Three out of four victims failed to report the harassment.<sup>115</sup>

Cyberbullying is a somewhat new entity, with awareness increasing since the 2010s. It is bullying through the use of digital devices. The general characteristics of the bullies and bullied have not changed, but generating rumors, making threats or sexual remarks, and disclosing personal information is easier online than face to face. And the

emotional responses to the attacks—frustration, anger, depression—are frequently stronger, if for no other reason than the increased frequency of the bullying.<sup>116</sup>

Online bullying victims may not know the identity of their tormentors or even why the bullying takes place. A recent *Time Magazine* post by Amanda MacMillian states Instagram is the worst social media for mental health. A survey of fifteen hundred teens and young adults identified higher levels of anxiety, depression, bullying, and FOMO (fear of missing out) when using Instagram compared to YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, or Snapchat. But the last four were associated with increased depression and anxiety as well.<sup>117</sup> Although it is not TPS itself, bullying can be the mechanism used to cut down a TP.

In time, recognition of cyberbullying will increase. A twenty-year-old woman was convicted of involuntary manslaughter after she sent her boyfriend texts encouraging him to commit suicide and he followed through with it.<sup>118</sup> The public may never know what her motives were, but we have realized texting has the same consequences as any other social behavior.

### **“When They Go Low”**

In 2017 James Patterson, the prolific best-selling author, claimed in the *Wall Street Journal* that he had been bullied in school. He had attended the local Catholic school and served Mass daily. Because he was a teacher’s kid (perhaps even a teacher’s pet), an altar boy, and first in his class, he got picked on.<sup>119</sup> This could be confused with TPS, but he was not all that successful yet and the bullying was ongoing—both of which are more characteristic of bullying than TPS.

Stephen King, another tall poppy writer, has directed unkind words toward Patterson’s writing, which could be viewed as either cutting or bullying. However, Patterson learned well from his youthful experiences and has not responded in kind. Instead, he has praised King for his writing abilities. Killing ‘em with kind words works every time. Or, as Michele Obama once stated: “When they go low, we go high.”<sup>120</sup>

## Hatfield-McCoy Feud

During the 1800s, the expanding railroads were king. Where would the rail routes traverse, and whose land had timber or mineral rights, especially coal? This pitted neighbor against neighbor; community against community; politicians shifting sides with states, individuals, and industries; and states against states. Amid the enormous events unfolding, along the border between West Virginia and Kentucky were two families at war with one another, their circumstances a microcosm of the changing nation.

This feud lasted from 1865 to 1891 between the Hatfields of Long County, West Virginia, and the McCoys of Pike County, Kentucky, with the Tug Fork River between them. The bully **William Anderson “Devil Anse” Hatfield** led his clan against **Randolph McCoy** and his. Neither man started with any land or inheritance, and envy plagued them from the beginning as they desired to be landowners. Eventually, Anse ran a prosperous timber business and had political connections, but the McCoys scraped out a living on their three-hundred-acre farm. Both men had numerous children, some of whom would die on the McCoy side during the feud.

Regardless of their differences, Devil Anse and Randolph both belonged to Confederate Home Guards, and their families fought for the South during the Civil War. Except for (Asa) Harmon McCoy, Randolph’s younger brother, who fought for the Union. He was considered a traitor, even by some of his family. During the war, Anse and his uncle, Jim Vance, formed a Confederate guerilla unit, the Logan Wildcats, to protect their homes and properties from the Union, but the group also terrorized the area.

In 1862 a Union Home Guard under the direction of Bill France shot and wounded Devil Anse’s friend Moses Cline while stealing horses. The following year, Anse tracked down France and killed him, fulfilling his vow of revenge. Harmon was shot during the exchange. France’s death and the other injuries spurred animosity between the two clans but did not start the feud officially.

On January 7, 1865, Harmon McCoy was headed home, discharged from the Union army because of a broken leg. Logan County rebels killed him only a few miles from his destination. Some suspected Devil Anse, riding with the Logan Wildcats, but he was accounted for and

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Jim Vance became the prime suspect. This was the first killing of one of the families' members.

Whether someone killed Harmon in revenge for his association with the shooting of Moses Cline, for his Union ties, or for being Bill France's neighbor and friend no one knows for certain, but all reasons are linked to Devil Anse, the revenge-seeking bully. Some believe Harmon's murder initiated the feud, but more than a decade passed before it escalated. It lay smoldering, and the Hatfields had been the first to draw blood.

The second recorded killing occurred in 1878 over the ownership of a hog. Devil Anse's cousin Floyd Hatfield had possession of it, but Randolph McCoy claimed it. The local justice of the peace—Anse's cousin "Preacher Anse"—ruled in favor of Floyd based on the testimony of Bill Staton, who was related to both sides. Two years later, two of Randolph's nephews killed Staton out of revenge, but they were acquitted on a ruling of self-defense. The feud was now firmly established and soon intensified.

Later that year, Roseanna McCoy became involved with Devil Anse's son, Johnse, after they met at an election event. Her father, Randolph, was furious and vehemently opposed the relationship, which forced her to move into the Hatfield household. Before long Johnse began to see other women. An angry, jealous Roseanna returned home, even though they continued to see each other. She was four months pregnant. Out of revenge, the McCoys arrested Johnse on outstanding Kentucky bootlegging warrants. Before they were able to move him to jail, Roseanna notified Devil, who rescued him.

Although Roseanna was pregnant by Johnse, neither family wanted them to marry. Randolph refused to accept her or her baby and forced her aunt to provide shelter. In 1881 Roseanna lost her eight-month-old daughter to the measles and Johnse to her cousin Nancy, whom he married. Burdened by feelings of guilt that her situation had contributed to the feud over the years, Roseanna would die of a broken heart at age twenty-nine, with jealousy, anger, resentment, and despair her closest companions.

In 1882 two Hatfield brothers engaged in an abusive argument with three of Roseanna's brothers on a rowdy Kentucky election day. Ellison Hatfield, who had testified against the McCoys that killed Bill Staton, was stabbed multiple times and shot in the back. Hatfield constables captured the brothers and took them to Preacher Anse's

house, where a couple of dozen men resided. When Ellison died two days later, the three McCoys were ruthlessly murdered in a display of anger and vigilante vengeance.

Twenty-one men, including Devil Anse and his sons, were indicted for murder but never arrested. Incensed, the McCoys enlisted Kentucky legislator Perry Cline, by then a tall poppy, to use his political connections for assistance. Charges were reinstated against the Hatfields and rewards offered for their arrests, but little happened for four years. Some felt justice had already been served, others knew judges and civil authorities held little sway over these clans, and the rest felt it best not to poke at sleeping bears.

### Perry Cline

The owner of six thousand acres of land on both sides of the Tug Fork River, Jacob Cline Sr. died in 1858. He willed five thousand acres to his son Perry, who was nine years old. Young Perry continued to live in the house on the West Virginia side with a brother and sister. In 1872 Devil Anse, who owned a plot beside his, accused him of logging on his land and initiated a lawsuit. Shortly after the suit was filed (intimidation), Cline left for the city and eventually lost the suit and the land.

Other events drove a deeper wedge between Perry and the Hatfields: He was a Unionist whose family had suffered raids from the Logan Wildcats. His sister Martha married Harmon McCoy, whom the Hatfields murdered. One of Perry's nephews was killed and two cousins severely beaten during the feud.

Perry became an attorney, then a representative in the Kentucky legislature, and used his political clout to harass the Hatfields.

At an election-grounds dance in 1886, Jeff McCoy and his wife's brother killed Fred Wolford, her uncle, over family matters. Both were indicted, but Jeff escaped to West Virginia. While there he decided he

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should settle an old score against Anse's son Cap and Deputy Tom Wallace—both had been accused of beating Jeff's sisters. Jeff captured Wallace, who escaped with a surface gunshot wound to his hip. Jeff tracked him to Devil Anse's home and lit up the place with gunshots. Cap had his uncle Wall Hatfield, Anse's older brother, issue a warrant for Jeff's arrest. Wall, Cap, and Deputy Wallace apprehended Jeff, then Cap shot him dead as he attempted to escape. (Wallace was found dead the following spring.)

The feud hit a political peak in Kentucky's 1887 gubernatorial race. Cline would deliver the McCoy vote to Governor-Elect Buckner if he promised to bring the Hatfields to justice. Cline wanted to reactivate the five-year-old indictments against Devil Anse and his clan for the three McCoy murders. Buckner could then blame West Virginia for endangering the Tug River area. By doing its part in squelching the feud and making its side of the valley safe, Kentucky could then court railroad industrialists who would extract coal and timber, boosting the state's economy.

After Buckner won reelection, Cline and Deputy Frank Phillips went to Frankfort, Kentucky, to finalize the plan to bring in the Hatfields. Paranoia struck the Hatfield clan, and Devil Anse reverted to his Logan Wildcat days.

The feud culminated with the 1888 New Year's Night Massacre. Jim Vance, Cap Hatfield, and the Hatfield gang surrounded the McCoy homestead in the middle of the night, set it ablaze, and opened fire on the sleeping household. Jim Vance beat Randolph's wife severely and killed two children. Randolph and the others escaped to Pikeville, where he and two sons would set up residency to distance themselves from the valley and Devil Anse.

A few days later, Governor Buckner appointed a posse to arrest the Hatfields involved in the attack. Within the Kentucky posse were Frank Phillips and three sons of Harmon McCoy. The group was to find and arrest the perpetrators—who were in West Virginia. They raided the Hatfields' and their supporters' homes.

When he refused to surrender, Jim Vance was the first fatality—at the hands of Frank Phillips. Twenty-three years after Harmon McCoy's death, his son-in-law had killed his likely murderer, who had also beaten Randolph's wife nearly to death—a sweet revenge for the McCoys, complete with schadenfreude. The posse killed two more

men and captured many others before surrounding the remainder at Devil Anse's Grapevine Creek homestead.

After a firefight, lawmen arrested seven Hatfield men, and Wall Hatfield turned himself in later. The posse took them to Kentucky to stand trial for the murder of Randolph's daughter during the New Year's attack. Devil Anse had escaped but was now vulnerable. He lost his homestead, the very land he stole from Perry Cline, which contained a huge coal deposit and was soon laced with railroads. He moved out of the valley and lived to be eighty-one.

Legal issues drew the US Supreme Court into the fray, and they upheld the interstate arrests. Ironically, Perry Cline defended Wall Hatfield, who received one of the life sentences meted out to all but Ellison Mounts. Cline witnessed the hanging of Mounts on February 18, 1890—the last of Kentucky's public executions.

Even near its end, the feud and its spin-offs dragged many people to misery and death. Randolph's daughter Roseanna and son Bill had died in 1889 of feud-related guilt and despair. Wall Hatfield died in prison in 1890. Cline died in 1891, still wishing for his property. Johnse's trial in 1901 was the last as the feuding wound down.<sup>121</sup>

The Hatfield-McCoy feud captured all the negative emotions that cause cutting in TPS: envy, jealousy, anger/violence, revenge, resentment, and ressentiment. Envy started the conflict between Devil Anse and Randolph. Anse was also a towering bully. There was no TP in the entire story, but remember, the syndrome occurs mostly within a person's tribe, which may not include a TP.

Contrast this study with Eleanor of Aquitaine, a millennium removed, which began with jealousy instead of envy, and a desire for land. The emotions were identical, but the players and circumstances were different: the earlier case had many TPs, wealth, education, power, and the world stage. Yet both of these case studies ended with people cutting down others because of negative emotions.

The protagonists from the tribes in the Hatfield-McCoy feud were two men who began life dirt poor and were separated by a river. The river provided a consummate comparison gallery that initiated bad envy. To a certain extent, crossing the river became their "Rubicon moments," but their actions did not lead to fame or fortune. Thereafter, the negative emotions flowed and cascaded into a swift current, a river of no return. The moral: if you ride the river of revenge, fill your boat with life vests.

## Conclusion

Anger, like envy, can be a positive emotion that encourages self-improvement. Negative anger, however, leads to stubbornness, aggression, obsession, and crimes of passion. Revenge is an end product of anger and a source of TPS, as are dueling, feuding, and other types of conflicts.

With its own set of criteria for diagnosis, bullying is a different syndrome than TPS and much more prevalent. The bully and the TPS envier are alike, whereas the bullied and the envied have different characteristics. Regardless of the differences between these syndromes, victims of each recognize that negative emotions have led to harmful actions—never a good thing.

From envy, resentment, and jealousy to anger and revenge, the emotional causes of TPS may be hidden within the bigger tents of hierarchies, movements, and politics. We should seek out emotions first when digging to find the roots of TPS beneath life's fertile soil.

Next we will explore the poppy's role in TPS. The poppy is a metaphor for emotion, and its meanings can vary widely.