



The Green-Eyed Monster

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TURN JEALOUSY INTO TRIUMPH.

When Pacific Northwest Ballet Principal Carla Körbes was 15, she had a crash course in jealousy. While training in her native Brazil, she was discovered by Peter Boal (then a principal at New York City Ballet), who convinced her to move to NYC. He talked The School of American Ballet officials into admitting her, even though the school was full! But while she did well in class, other students treated her horribly: "It was like a movie," she recalls. "People stood behind me and made jokes trying to make me feel bad."

Despite being picked on initially, the strong bonds Körbes eventually created with her classmates helped when she broke her foot and tore a ligament during her second year. The injury kept her out of the studio for two years, and Körbes felt jealous of her friends who made it into NYCB while she was recovering. "It was an awful feeling," she says. "I loved these people so much, but they got something that I wanted and I thought that my chance was over."

Körbes kept her feelings bottled up after she was injured, which made her depressed and upset. But when she was hired at NYCB a few years later, she realized that her feelings of jealousy were moot. "People evolve at different rates," she says. "If I'd gotten into the company when I was young, I probably wouldn't have survived." The time she spent on the sidelines strengthened her physically and emotionally, and reinforced her feeling that she wanted to dance more than anything.

Körbes also realized that when dancers compare themselves to each other, it's detrimental to the artform: "When people want to dance like each other, we all look the same and dance loses its magic," she says.

WHAT IS JEALOUSY?

"Jealousy can be described as an uncomfortable feeling that occurs when something desired is perceived as being given to another person," explains Harlene Goldschmidt, a psychologist on staff at New Jersey Dance Theatre Ensemble. "It can be a powerfully overwhelming emotion that causes a person to misperceive or distort the reality of his or her situation." If this distortion is ignored, insecurity is likely to become heightened, which can in turn damage self-esteem and ruin relationships. The more insecure you are about yourself, the greater risk you're at for being jealous.

Diana Gebhardt, owner and director of Step by Step in Millstone Township, NJ, adds, "It's natural to be jealous of those around you. The grass is always greener." Jealousy can be productive if it motivates you to try harder, but it becomes detrimental when it causes you to set unattainable standards for yourself.

Learning how to look at scenarios from alternative points of view can help you stay strong and avoid letting jealousy spiral out of control. Here are a few ways to deal.

SCENARIO #1 : After you've worked your way up to be the top dancer in your school, your teacher gives the lead role to the new girl. Convinced your teacher is just trying to be nice to her, you tell everyone that the new girl is really not that good, and that your teacher just feels sorry for her.

HOW TO DEAL: Instead of seeing this girl as a threat, let her be the kick in the pants you need to propel yourself to the next level. Also, don't ignore your feelings. Acknowledging disappointment, frustration and anger is the first step to managing jealousy. If unaddressed, jealousy can spiral into depression and can cause you to burn bridges. "You'll feel better if you focus on what you need," says psychologist Linda Hamilton. "If you're making people feel badly, you're not going to end up with many friends."

SCENARIO #2: Every role in your school's major productions is given to one of a handful of girls. You think, "Why bother even trying? I'm just setting myself up for disappointment."

HOW TO DEAL: Turn your jealousy into motivation. "Instead of thinking, 'It's not fair that she always gets the best roles in the dance,' change it into 'She's such a good dancer. I need to push myself to reach her level,'" Gebhardt advises.

SCENARIO #3: The girl who auditions before you for your competition company's group jazz number is three inches taller than you. You think, "If only I was one inch taller I could compete with her. At my current height she's in a completely different league. "

HOW TO DEAL: There are opportunities for dancers of all heights, and stellar technique is your key to nabbing parts. Dancers who size themselves up against others are at greatest risk of falling into the jealousy trap because "dancers' bodies, their facility and natural talent are in many ways predetermined," says Goldschmidt. Since other people decide who gets cast in a role or wins a competition, your biggest defense against jealousy is to believe in yourself.

SCENARIO #4: The best girl in class always gets the most attention. Since you just started pointe and feel wobbly, you dance at the back. But you think, "How am I supposed to get better if I don't get any help?"

HOW TO DEAL: Teachers give the most attention to the students they think can handle the feedback-and who they can see! Standing in the back makes it seem like you're trying to hide. Take control of this situation by moving to the front row so your teacher knows you're serious about getting her help.

SCENARIO #5: Your best friend is a natural. She can walk into class and execute the choreography perfectly right away. You're finding it hard to hang around her without feeling bad about yourself.

HOW TO DEAL: Working hard for something will help you gain the respect of those in power. "From an instructor's perspective, it's much better to see a dancer push herself to improve by working really hard, as opposed to those who 'just have it,'" says Gebhardt. Also, if you truly value this person's friendship, be mindful of any nasty comments that you make. She's unlikely to understand that your mean actions are rooted in jealousy. She could end up feeling badly about herself-which means you could lose her as a friend, a price which is not worth paying. The more insecure you are about yourself, the greater risk you're at for being jealous.

WHEN YOU'RE THE TARGET

Being the target of jealousy can make you feel bad about yourself, especially if you don't realize that the hurtful comments or behaviors are coming from someone who's jealous of your talent. Gebhardt says that while most students don't inform their instructor about jealousy issues until they escalate, realizing where feelings of jealousy stem from can save a lot of heartache. "One time, a dancer at my studio came to me crying hysterically because she felt like everyone in her class didn't like her," says Gebhardt. "This girl happens to be one of the better dancers at the studio and she was on the receiving end of her peers' jealousies."

While not taking rude comments personally is easier said than done, it really is key to protecting your feelings. "If you say, 'Thank you so much for caring. That's thoughtful of you,' and you look like you're just fine, then they haven't accomplished what they wanted," says Hamilton. They're going to be less likely to do it in the future." You can also simply ignore the comments, which may not be easy (and is a more passive approach), but it can help avoid conflict.

And lastly, even though being the target of jealousy may be a compliment in a way, protect your self-esteem by surrounding yourself with people who make you feel good about yourself.