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Fleishman is in Trouble: How not to envy your rich friends

Resenting friends we deem to be wealthier is a problem as old as time, and affects those in all income brackets. So what can we do about it?



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Toby Fleishman, played by Jesse Eisenberg, is at a dinner with his wife’s school-run friends. Fleishman is a doctor, and, it seems, a successful one. He has a \$300,000 (£250,000) salary and

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thanks to his father buying up the insurance for people who had aids. They are bankers and tech bros. They come from a long line of opulence, athleisure and pharmaceuticals. Poor Fleishman.

The final straw for Fleishman comes when one of the very rich dads implies medicine isn't an impressive career. *Fleishman in Trouble* – out on now Disney Plus and adapted from Taffy Brodesser-Akner's novel – is, among many things, an honest look at what happens when your social circle makes you feel financially inadequate.

But this isn't just a "problem" for New York doctors on six-figure salaries. Envyng those people around us who we perceive to be more prosperous is a problem as old as time itself, and affects those in all income brackets. So what can we do about it?

Financial therapist Vanessa Emile has countless clients who struggle with jealousy and it is, from her experience, one of the things that actually prevents people from reaching their earning potential.

"I see a lot of people who are really jealous of their best friends," says Emile. "A lot of the times this sort of jealousy happens when people have money and then they lose it. Perhaps they had to sell their home and now rent or live in social housing and their friends are still financially well-off."

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As a result, Emile's clients feel ashamed. "Some of my clients don't want to invite friends over to their house any more," she says. "They feel looked down on by their friends and they feel insecure."

Instead of cutting these friends off or avoiding them at all costs, as Fleishman does, Emile advises embracing these friendships. "Absolutely do not cut these friends off," she says. "You should use them to inspire you. If we give in to jealousy, we end up getting quite bitter and it can block our financial goals."

Director of Wise Monkey Financial Coaching Simonne Gnessen agrees. "It's sometimes good to be around people that will push you," she says. "But I also tell my clients to focus on what is fulfilling to them, not anyone else."

This is sometimes difficult to pin-point. In the digital age, social comparison is everywhere and near-impossible to avoid. There are the friends on [Instagram](#) that are enjoying their third expensive holiday of the year or that couple on Twitter with an impossibly large townhouse in central London (and yes we've all looked at the price on Zoopla).

"Comparison is of course rife on social media," says Gnessen. "Seeing someone getting up the career ladder or having more holidays than you can make us feel inadequate, or like you're falling behind. The question that crops up with my clients is always, 'am I doing okay?' But your self-esteem shouldn't be based on others."

For those feeling inadequate about having a smaller salary, more often than not, it's not really about your salary. Wealth envy is something that May Fairweather's clients battle with frequently.

"The common thread with clients is if you feel envious of others it usually means your life isn't aligned with your values," says Fairweather, a financial therapist at [Fairweather Adventures](#).

"Always ask why you feel upset about your income, especially if it's a healthy one. Is it because you value yourself based on money? Is it about what other people think about you? If that's the case you will never stop wanting more money, and the problem will never go away."

Gnessen also suggests looking inward. "Ask yourself, what fulfils you? Social comparison is rife, but how do you actually define success? If you are not sure, this could be causing envy," she says.

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For Fairweather, happiness is not about making more money. This is perhaps one of life's most tempting traps. "Some people with less money have more freedom," she says. "If you earn a lot, you often have a huge mortgage or private schools to pay for. You have more commitments, and you're less fulfilled." She adds: "More money, more problems."

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