
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the Effects of Chinese Mother Jealousy on Adolescent Daughters: An Analysis Based on Online Interview Data

Haiyan Sheng

School of Educational Studies, University Sains Malaysia, Penang 10000-14000, Malaysia

Corresponding Author: Haiyan Sheng, **E-mail:** ylx1234560806@163.com

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore the effects of Chinese mothers being jealous of their adolescent daughters. Adolescence is a critical period where maternal mood and attitudes have important effects on daughter's development and mental well-being. Eight adolescent daughters were interviewed on the Internet. The content of the interviews mainly covered the mother's jealousy about her daughter's appearance, achievements and social interaction. Through the content analysis of the interview data, the researcher tried to understand the effects of maternal jealousy on their daughters and the causes and forms of jealousy emotions. The purpose of this study is to deeply understand the influence of Chinese mothers' jealousy on their adolescent daughters. By analyzing data from online interviews, the researcher hopes to reveal how mothers' jealousy affects their daughter's self-esteem and physical and mental health, as well as the causes and specific manifestations of the jealousy. Based on the analysis of the interview data of eight adolescent daughters, the results of the study revealed that Chinese mother's appearance jealousy has a negative impact on their daughter's physical self-esteem. Social jealousy is mainly reflected in the jealousy of her daughter's social relationships and interpersonal skills, which may lead to the daughter feeling insecure or inferior in the social circle. Achievement jealousy mainly manifests itself as jealousy of her daughter's academic and career success, which may lead to guilt or uneasiness in her pursuit of achievement. In a word, the jealousy of Chinese mothers has a negative impact on the self-esteem and physical and mental health of their adolescent daughters. Understanding the causes and forms of this kind of jealousy is of great significance for promoting the harmonious development of the mother-daughter relationship and the healthy growth of their daughters.

KEYWORDS

Maternal jealousy, adolescent daughter, mother-daughter relationship, online interview.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 27 September 2023

PUBLISHED: 03 October 2023

DOI: 10.32996/jhsss.2023.5.10.5

1. Introduction

In general, mothers always love their children selflessly. In the story of Snow White, Snow White is admired by people for her beauty and kindness. However, her biological mother (the original story) was jealous of her. The queen could not stand the beauty and beloved image of Snow White, so she constantly framed Snow White, trying to destroy her self-esteem and happiness. Snow White had to run away. The story is widely spread. People remember the beautiful Snow White, the seven dwarfs and the evil queen. However, in some respects, the story also reflects the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship.

The mother-daughter relationship is a very important topic (Douglass, 2005). Children spend more time with their mothers than with their fathers (Craig, 2006). Therefore, mothers may have more impact on their children. Gilligan (1993) believed that mothers and the way they interact with their daughters determine their self-identity and the way they interact in the social environment. Greene (1990) held that mothers are the image and main role model in women's lives, and the mother-daughter relationship plays an important role in improving daughters' self-esteem. In the traditional culture of China, it is very important to value family

concepts and filial piety. The relationship between mother and daughter is regarded as a way of perpetuating and inheriting family values. Mothers play an important role in the growth and life of their daughters, creating a close emotional connection between them. Mothers teach their daughters how to respect their elders, be filial, and how to be good women. Mothers usually play an important role in nurturing their daughters in Chinese families. They have high expectations for their daughter's education and development, including academic performance, career choice, and marriage (Chodorow, 1974).

Adolescence is a critical stage in everyone's growth process, and both daughters and mothers are full of challenges and changes. At this stage, the daughter goes through physical changes, facing academic and social pressure, as well as exploring her self-identity and establishing her independence (Smolak & Murnen, 2011). However, studies suggest that there may be a complex emotion between mother and daughter, namely maternal jealousy of their adolescent daughter (Liu, 2023). Jealousy refers to a person's dissatisfaction, anxiety, inequality or inferiority with their strengths, achievements or traits, resulting in a strong mood and feelings of envy or jealousy towards others (Yang & Zhang, 2009). Jealousy is a complex emotion that involves comparison and competition between individuals (Li et al., 2020). Jealousy has some negative effects on people. Jealousy can destroy individual emotional stability and self-worth and reduce subjective well-being (Casu, 2015). Xiang et al. (2022) enriched this conclusion by tracking and diary studies. Some researchers have made a survey about jealousy. For example, Parrott and Smith (1993) delved into the characteristics of jealousy by distinguishing the experiences between envy and jealousy. They found that jealousy was associated with a decreased sense of self-worth, aggressive behavior, and social conflict. Salovey and Rodin (1984) discussed the causes and consequences of social jealousy. They found that jealousy can lead to impaired personal self-esteem and negative emotions and affect interpersonal relationships. Chen et al. (2013) have found that jealousy can hinder a person's success. Wang (2021) found that there was a significant negative correlation between self-esteem and jealousy among higher vocational students. However, throughout domestic and foreign studies, most studies involve the jealousy between compatriots, students, and employees, but the jealousy in the mother-daughter relationship is rarely noticed and studied. Therefore, this study aimed to gain an insight into the jealousy phenomenon of Chinese mothers towards their adolescent daughters and to explore the effects of this jealousy on the mother-daughter relationship and the development of their daughters.

In order to achieve this goal, this study used an analytical approach based on online interview data. The researcher talked in depth with eight adolescent daughters and explored the jealousy mood and influence between them and their mothers. The advantage of this approach is the ability to gain the true feelings and experiences of the respondents while protecting their privacy.

This study hopes to reveal the specific effects of jealousy of Chinese mothers on adolescent daughters and provide corresponding solutions and suggestions. This not only helps to enhance the understanding of the emotional interaction in the mother-daughter relationship and contributes to the harmonious development of the mother-daughter relationship but also provides relevant practical suggestions for the family and society.

1.1 Research Questions

1. What are the forms of Chinese mothers' jealousy towards their daughters?
2. What are the main reasons for Chinese mothers' jealousy of their daughters?
3. What effect does Chinese mothers' jealousy have on their daughter's self-esteem, self-confidence and mental health?
4. What factors may alleviate the impact of Chinese mothers' jealousy on their daughters?

1.2 Study Objectives

1. To understand the jealousy that Chinese mothers may have when their daughters enter puberty.
2. To analyze the factors that may lead to mothers' jealousy, such as social pressure and self-image problems.
3. To explore the effects of maternal jealousy on adolescent daughters, including emotional, parent-child relationship and their mental health.
4. To make suggestions and measures to help mothers better cope with jealousy and promote positive mother-daughter relationships and the healthy development of their daughters.

1.3 Research Significance

This study will help to fill a gap in this field of research and provide more insights into understanding the effects of maternal jealousy on adolescent daughters. By studying the phenomenon of mother jealousy, we can provide practical suggestions for the improvement of family relations and the promotion of family harmony. By understanding the effects of maternal jealousy on their adolescent daughters, guidance and support for adolescent daughters and their families can be provided. By revealing the influence mechanisms of maternal jealousy, intervention strategies and support measures can be provided for the mental health and growth of adolescent daughters. This study can investigate the effects of maternal jealousy on adolescent daughters. This helps to promote social awareness of mothers' jealousy and provides a basis for relevant policy making and social support.

2. Research Methods

This study used a qualitative approach for content analysis of web interview data from eight adolescent girls. The interviews of this study covered the performance of maternal jealousy, influencing factors and multifaceted effects on daughter development. The existing interview recording was transcribed, and the data were coded and classified.

2.1 Performance of the mother's jealousy

2.1.1 Appearance Jealousy

Adolescent daughters are in their physical development, and their appearance may become more attractive and younger. If the mother herself is dissatisfied or negatively rated about her appearance, she may feel jealous of her daughter's appearance.

A1: When I was in high school, I weighed 40 kilograms. My mother said that I was too fat and my face was too big. Nobody would like me.

A2: After my military training in high school, my mother said I was the ugliest in the class photos, and I didn't know why she said that, so I always thought I was really ugly.

A3: My mother is jealous of me sometimes. I don't know if it is real jealousy, but sometimes the words make me feel and probably belittle my image. For example, when she chatted with her friends or acquaintances, if they praised my beauty, she would belittle my image. She often said that her waist was so thin, her wrist was so thin, and everywhere was fine. She said my face was so fat last night. When I buy new clothes, my mother always says that the clothes I wear are very ugly, but when she buys new clothes, she will ask me to say that she looks good.

Content analysis: From the description of the above three daughters, it can be seen that the mother is jealous of their growing adolescent daughter in appearance and dispels her confidence so as to improve their self-esteem and superiority.

- (1) Body image criticism: The daughter mentioned that her mother often criticized her weight, face size and dress choices, which may be related to the mother's jealousy. Mothers may feel jealous of their daughter's appearance and try to alleviate their insecurity by belittling the daughter's image.
- (2) Self-image distress: The daughter said that her mother often belittles her appearance, leading to a negative self-evaluation of her own image. This constant negative evaluation may lead her daughter to feel that she is really ugly, affecting her self-esteem and self-confidence.
- (3) Jealous comments: The daughter mentioned that her mother degraded her image when talking to her friends and compared her appearance with herself. The comments may be the mother's attempt to highlight her superiority through comparison while hinting at her jealousy of her daughter.

2.1.2 Social Jealousy

Adolescent daughters may start making friends, attending social activities, and be noticed and appreciated by their peers. If the mother herself feels insecure or lacks social opportunities, she may feel jealous of her daughter's social life.

A4: She doesn't allow me to make friends at school, nor does she allow me to spend the night with any friends. My after-school activities depend on what my mother felt on that day. There are no visitors, not even the neighbors. I have no social circles. Later in life, I became very introverted and shy, hardly knowing how to talk to people casually, and I did not know how to make friends or be friendly because I was not taught social skills. On the contrary, I was brought up but deprived of social rights.

A5: At the end of high school study, I walked out of the school with a boy. We were talking about Maths. My mother saw it and said that no wonder my academic performance was so poor; I was in love.

A6: When I was a middle school student, my mother asked me to cut my hair short like a boy. She always bought me some simple clothes and shoes. She wanted me to look like a boy. My friends often call me 'tomboy'. I envy those beautiful girls. I don't know how to make up, though I am old enough now.

Content analysis: From the description of the two daughters, it can be seen that the mother is socially jealous of their growing adolescent daughter, and she hopes that her daughter will show more things that meet her social expectations and standards.

- (1) Social restrictions: The daughter mentioned that the mother does not allow her daughter to be friends at school and not to stay at night, which may be related to the mother's jealousy. She may be worried that her daughter's deep relationship with others and that her daughter will get more attention and recognition, leading to her own insecurity or jealousy.

- (2) Lack of social skills: The daughter said that she was deprived of her social rights and was not taught social skills, which may cause her difficulty in communicating and making friends. The mother's jealousy may lead to her restricting her daughter's social development and not giving her the opportunity to learn and develop social skills, thus affecting her daughter's interpersonal relationships and social circle.
- (3) Identity problems: The daughter mentioned that the mother cut her hair short and bought the boy's clothes and shoes, which made her daughter called "Tomboy" by her friends, which may cause trouble to her daughter's gender identity, limiting her social experience and unable to establish a deep relationship with others. The mother's jealousy may lead to her trying to lose her femininity to reduce the attention and recognition of others, thus reducing her own jealousy.

2.1.3 Achievement Jealousy

A daughter may succeed in school, art, sports or other fields. If the mother herself is dissatisfied or not recognized in these respects, she may feel jealous of her daughter's achievements.

A7: I won the first prize in junior high school composition and shared it with my mother happily. My mother just said: I see, don't stop me from doing things. But actually, she was just watching TV. Several times, I shared the good news with her, she was still very cold.

A8: My mother thinks I'm stupid and always bad at math. I always thought so, and then I do a lot of exercises. One day, the math paper was very difficult, but I unexpectedly got second place in class. I was surprised to tell my mother; my mother said: you know you are stupid, so this time, I think, because you are lucky. Many times, when I got good grades, my mother always said I was lucky but never said I worked hard. My mother kept giving me all of these hints. Until I believed that my good grades were because I was lucky, not my efforts. If I get good grades, I will comfort myself that I am very lucky. If I get bad grades, I will think that I deserve it because I am stupid, especially in the math exam.

Content analysis: From the description of the above two daughters, it can be seen that the mother had achievement jealousy of the daughter. Instead of expressing support and encouragement to the daughter, the mother uses the way of derogatory daughter's achievement or dismisses the daughter's success to hinder the daughter's growth and development.

1. Achievement jealousy: The daughter mentioned that when she won the first prize, the mother did not show positive attention and excitement but responded with a cold attitude. This may mean that she is jealous of her daughter's achievements, as it may make her feel that her achievements are relatively neglected.
2. Negative of ability: The daughter described the mother's opinion that her daughter was stupid, which may be an attempt to reduce her jealousy by belittling her daughter's ability. When her daughter did well on the math test, she chose to attribute luck rather than admit her daughter's efforts, which further indicates that she was jealous of her achievements. Through her mother's doubts and denial, the daughter may begin to self-doubt her ability to attribute success to luck rather than her own efforts. This may lead to a lack of confidence in study and other aspects, relying solely on luck rather than effort.

2.2 Effects of maternal jealousy on their adolescent daughters

2.2.1 The Influence of Appearance Jealousy

Mothers' appearance jealousy may negatively affect their daughters, especially during their growth and identity stages.

Mothers' appearance jealousy may make their daughters feel devalued, leading to a negative self-perception and sense of self-worth about their appearance and body. This may lead to emotional problems such as physical discomfort, depression, anxiety, and depression, as well as body image problems such as eating disorders, self-aversion, and self-harm. Daughters may also feel their mother's dissatisfaction and lack of understanding, resulting in the estrangement between mother and daughter.

In addition, mothers' appearance jealousy may also influence their social relationships and identity. Daughters may find it difficult to fit into the social circle of their peers or feel confused about their identity and role. They may try to meet their mother's expectations by changing their appearance while ignoring their real needs and personality.

2.2.2 The Influence of Social Jealousy

Mothers' social jealousy may negatively impact their daughters, especially during their stages of social and self-identity development.

Mothers' social jealousy may make daughters feel restricted and monitored, and they may not feel free to establish and maintain their social relationships. Daughters may be excessively interfered with and criticized by their mothers for making their friends,

leading to their negative self-perception of their social skills and social values. This may lead to social anxiety, inferiority complex, loneliness, self-isolation, and may even affect their mental health and self-esteem.

Mothers' social jealousy may also influence a daughter's identity and self-development. Daughters may feel unable to truly express their interests, needs, and personalities for fear of causing maternal jealousy and dissatisfaction. They may try to suppress their independence and uniqueness to meet maternal expectations, leading to difficulties in developing self-identity and building good social relationships.

2.2.3 The Influence of Achievement Jealousy

Mothers' achievement jealousy may have negative effects on their children, including self-esteem, self-confidence, mood, and family relationships.

- (1) Mothers' achievement jealousy may lead to impaired children's self-esteem. When a mother is jealous of her child's achievements, she may express this jealousy by criticizing, belittling, or ignoring her child's achievements. This may make the children feel that their efforts and achievements can not be recognized and appreciated, thus reducing their self-esteem.
- (2) Mothers' achievement jealousy may affect their children's self-confidence. When a mother is jealous of her children's achievements, she may send a message to them that they are not well enough or worthy of success. This may lead children to doubt their own abilities and values, reducing their confidence and confidence in their own abilities.
- (3) Mothers' achievement jealousy may negatively affect their children's emotions. Children may feel guilty, depressed, anxious or angry because they cannot understand why their mothers feel jealous of their achievements. This mood may have a negative impact on their children's mental health, affecting their well-being and quality of life.
- (4) Mothers' achievement jealousy may have negative effects on family relationships. A jealous and competitive atmosphere in the family can lead to a sense of tension and alienation, undermining intimacy and support among family members. This may lead to conflict and discord between family members, with negative effects on the overall well-being of the family.

Table 1: Statistics of information of interviewees

Number	Types of mother's jealousy	Influence on adolescent daughter
A1	appearance jealousy	Negative view of their own image,
A2		too much attention to the appearance,
A3		Low self-esteem,
A4	social jealousy	negative emotional problems
A5		Reduced self-confidence
A6		Reduces social skills
A7	achievement of jealousy	Unhealthy interpersonal relationships
A8		Self-denial and negative emotional problems
		Self-denial, excessive competition, loss of self-esteem, a negative sense of self-worth, and negative emotional problems

Source: the author's interview.

3. Reasons

- (1) Age and appearance: Chinese society has high requirements for women's age and appearance, and some mothers may feel jealous because of their age increase and changes in their appearance. When they see their daughters young, energetic, and physically attractive, they will feel that their youth is gone, and they may be jealous of her youth and beauty.
- (2) Change in parent-child relationship: Adolescence is a turning point in a person's life cycle, during which girls begin to gradually become independent and develop their own personalities, and their mother feels lost control and influence over her daughter, thus generating jealousy.
- (3) Social and interpersonal relationships: Chinese society attaches great importance to interpersonal relationships, and some mothers may feel jealous because their daughters are more successful in building and maintaining social relationships during adolescence. Mothers may feel that their daughters are more likely to make friends and get attention and recognition from others, and they may feel neglected or excluded.
- (4) Education and career development: Chinese mothers usually have high expectations for their children's education and career development, and some mothers may feel jealous of their daughters' good grades in their studies and careers. Mothers may feel that their daughters have greater access to better educational and career opportunities to achieve greater success in society.

- (5) Parental relationship and family pressure: There is a certain patriarchal culture in Chinese families, and some mothers may feel jealous of their daughters because of their disharmonious relationship with their husbands or family pressure. They may feel jealous of their daughters for being more valued or favored in the family.

4. Suggestions

- (1) Self-reflection and cognition: Mothers can start to reflect on their jealousy and try to understand the reasons behind it. This includes recognizing that one's worth depends not only on your appearance or age but also on developing your personal achievement and satisfaction through other aspects.
- (2) Emotion management: Mothers can learn some emotion management skills, such as deep breathing, meditation, exercise or keeping a diary to help them deal with jealousy. At the same time, seeking support and understanding, such as sharing feelings with friends and relatives or seeking professional help, can provide emotional support and guidance.
- (3) Communication and understanding: Establish open and supportive communication channels so that mothers can honestly communicate their feelings and puzzles with their daughters. At the same time, mother and daughter can listen to each other's thoughts and feelings and understand the challenges and pressures they may face. Through mutual understanding and support, mother and daughter links can be strengthened, and healthier relationships are promoted.
- (4) Cultivate self-esteem and self-confidence: Mothers can encourage their daughters to develop their interests and talents and give appropriate appreciation and encouragement. At the same time, daughters can also encourage their mothers to find their own interests and pursue personal achievements in other fields to improve their self-esteem and self-confidence.
- (5) Seek professional help: If the mother finds that she is unable to handle jealousy or it has a negative impact on her daughter, she can seek help from a professional psychological counselor or family counselor. They can provide personalized support and guidance to help mothers better understand and manage their emotions and improve the mother-daughter relationship.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to deeply explore the jealousy phenomenon of Chinese mothers towards adolescent daughters and understand the effects of different types of jealousy on the mother-daughter relationship and the development of daughters. Through online interviews and content analysis of eight adolescent daughters, the present study reached the following conclusions: First, the research found different types of jealousy, including appearance jealousy, achievement jealousy and social jealousy. Mothers may be jealous of their daughter's youthful beauty and unhappy with their own changing age. They may be jealous of their daughter's academic or career success or social circle and relationships. Second, this jealousy has a negative impact on the mother-daughter relationship and the development of the daughter. Mothers may restrict and control their daughter's behavior, affecting their daughter's self-esteem and physical and mental health. The contribution of this study to the existing literature lies in deeply revealing the jealousy of Chinese mothers towards their adolescent daughters and exploring their influence on mother-daughter relationships and the development of their daughters. This provides insights and guidance to professionals in the fields of family education and mental health to help them better understand and respond to this phenomenon.

However, there are still some limitations in this study. First, the sample size was small, covering only eight adolescent daughters, which limit the generality of the findings. Second, the study used online interviews and may be at risk of recall bias or incomplete information. Future studies could expand the sample size and employ multiple research methods, such as questionnaires and long-term tracking studies, to further validate and deepen the understanding of this phenomenon. In conclusion, this study has important implications for understanding the jealousy phenomenon of Chinese mothers towards their adolescent daughters and their influence on mother-daughter relationships and daughter development. By providing deep insight and guidance, this study provides a valuable reference for professionals in the field of family education and mental health and provides inspiration and suggestions for future research.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

References

- [1] Casu, G. (2015). *Envy: A psychometric refinement of the construct* [Doctoral dissertation, Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna]. AMS Dottorato. <http://amsdottorato.unibo.it/6861/>
- [2] Chen, J., Wang, L., & Lanhai, J. (2013). Jealousy, the obstacle on the road to success - College students are generally jealous psychological case analysis. *Theory, Modern Property, Modern Economy*, 12(5), 5-118.
- [3] Chodorow, N. (1974). Family structure and feminine personality. In M. Z. Rosaldo, L. Lamphere, & J. Bamberger (Eds.), *Women, culture and society* (pp. 43-66). Stanford University Press.

- [4] Craig, L. (2006). Does father care mean fathers share?: A comparison of how mothers and fathers in intact families spend time with children. *Gender and Society*, 20(2), 259-281. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205285212>
- [5] Douglass, M. J. (2005). *An exploration of the relationship between the perception of mother-daughter relationship, feminist consciousness and self-esteem in the adolescent/young adult daughter* (Publication Number 3195890) The College of William and Mary]. ProQuest.
- [6] Gilligan, C. (1993). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Harvard university press.
- [7] Greene, B. A. (1990). What has gone before: The legacy of racism and sexism in the lives of black mothers and daughters. *Women and Therapy*, 9(1-2), 207-230. https://doi.org/10.1300/J015V09N01_12
- [8] Li, F., Wang, J., & Chen, Z. (2020). The influence of perceived envy on employees' positive emotions: The moderating role of age. *Journal of Psychological Science*, 43(4), 891-897.
- [9] Liu, M. (2023). Love in Shadow: The narrative of east Asian mother-daughter relationship in contemporary films. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11, 58-63. <https://doi.org/10.54097/EHSS.V11I1.7503>
- [10] Parrott, W. G., & Smith, R. H. (1993). Distinguishing the experiences of envy and jealousy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 64(6), 906-920. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.64.6.906>
- [11] Salovey, P., & Rodin, J. (1984). Some antecedents and consequences of social-comparison jealousy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 47(4), 780-792. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.47.4.780>
- [12] Smolak, L., & Murnen, S. K. (2011). Adolescent girls' development: identity formation, body image, and social media. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 181-188. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00721.x>
- [13] Wang, K. K. (2021). Research on self-esteem level and jealousy among higher vocational students. *Modern Vocational Education*, (1), 116-117.
- [14] Xiang, Y., He, J., & Li, Q. (2022). The causal mechanism between envy and subjective well-being: Based on a longitudinal study and a diary method. *Acta Psychologica Sinica*, 54(1), 40-53. <https://doi.org/10.3724/SP.J.1041.2022.00040>
- [15] Yang, L., & Zhang, J. (2009). Progress and orientation of jealous psychology research. *Psychological Science*, 32(3), 655-657. <https://doi.org/10.16719/j.cnki.1671-6981.2009.03.027>