

The Green Being: Effect Of Parental Envy on Parent-Child Relationship

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Abstract

This study examines how parental envy affects parent-child relationship quality in India, focusing on emotional dynamics and gender differences. Using a correlational design, 212 educated Indian parents (aged 30–60) completed the Child-Parent Relationship Scale-Short Form and the Benign and Malicious Envy Scale. Results showed a slight positive correlation between parental envy and relationship quality, suggesting a counterintuitive link. Benign envy was positively associated with conflict but unrelated to closeness, while malicious envy showed no significant associations. Gender analysis revealed that women reported higher conflict, closeness, and benign envy, whereas men reported higher malicious envy. Findings highlight cultural influences such as collectivism and gender roles, calling for deeper research and interventions in envy management and family counseling to strengthen Indian parent-child relationships.

Keywords: *Parent-child relationship, parental envy, Indian population, gender*

1. Introduction

Envy is one of the more complex emotions, deep into the experiences of social interactions and comparisons. Philosophers such as Aristotle and Immanuel Kant have laid down the foundations of the emotions. Aristotle (Rhetoric) held that envy (*phthonos*) is pain arising through the good fortune of another, especially when it serves as evidence of one's own disparity. Kant, on the other hand,

proposed a new twist, according to which envy is no longer dissatisfaction with one's own lot but rather the discomfort arising from seeing a greater lot elsewhere—that is, envy shifts the spectrum of self-worth from internal to external standards (Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*).

Subsequent developments in psychology elaborate further upon these propositions and identify envy in particular as the product of upward social comparison—that is, an individual compares and evaluates against another he views as more successful (Festinger, 1954). It has two main types or dimensions: benign envy that motivates self-improvement and malignant envy that causes resentment and destructive behavior toward the envied person (Van de Ven et al., 2011). Present-day social networking tools cultivate envy, as these platforms depict idealistic versions of people's lives, thereby often bringing down the self-esteem of viewers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

While envy has mostly been researched in relation to peers, little has been said about how it manifests itself in family dynamics, specifically in the parent-child relationship. In collectivistic cultures like India, where a child's triumphs can often bring reputation to the whole family, envy can quietly stir when the child in certain ways outranks the parent in terms of education, opportunities, or recognition (Chadda & Deb, 2013). The underlying cultural framework with respect to parental authority and the suppression of emotions complicates further acknowledge open-heartedly (Singh & Choudhury, 2021).

Parental envy that is rarely admitted can at times surface in emotional withdrawal, guilt induction, or extreme control measures especially when parents perceive the successful path of their children as a direct reminder of lost potential in their own lives (Mishra 2016). This, ironically, brings forth contention into the parent-child relationship and emotional perplexity, even precipitating role reversals within the family. Amidst the currents of shifting culture, Indian families' mediations stand to benefit if parental envy is embraced and dealt with; it will foster authenticity within the emotional landscape and thus allow for intergenerational healing (Lamb, 2009).

2. Review of Literature

Parental envy has long stood a subtle phenomenon there to explain parent-child relationships; it is

now, however, increasingly theorized as an important aspect therein. A situation in which a parent considers the child's accomplishments as overshadowing his or her own brings about feelings of resentment, a desire to control, or withdrawal from the child (Adams & Lerner, 2020). Parental envy does not simply cause interpersonal disruption, but leads to chronic strain on the relational level, thereby reducing interpersonal closeness and increasing conflict within the family (Bronte-Tinkew & Horowitz, 2010). These dynamics jeopardize psychological security for the children and may lead to long-term developmental consequences of low self-esteem, anxiety, and identity confusion. Parental envy has also been linked to maladaptive controlling behavior like guilt-induction, emotional invalidation, and over-monitoring, which makes the child further restricted in his autonomy and expressions. Parental envy in the Indian context is shaped by socio-cultural realities different from those elsewhere. Indian families inculcate collectivistic values that regard obedience, family honor, and intergenerational loyalty as sacrosanct (Chadda & Deb, 2013). The parents tend to perceive children's achievements as a reflection of their own identity, causing certain blurry boundaries between support and possessiveness (Mishra, 2016). When children surpass parents in educational, economic, or social stature, this tends to elevate feelings of inadequacy or loss of relevance, especially for a generation whose parents had sacrificed their aspirations (Mishra, 2016). The patriarchal nature then makes the matter more complex, with sons required to keep up the lineage and daughters tightly controlled in terms of their behaviors and choices (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2018). The oppositions set by the expectations thus unconsciously make parents more prone to feel envy when children do things contrary to their own paths.

Parenting styles mediate the expression of parental envy. Studies reveal authoritarian tendencies in Indian households because of the cultural accent on control and discipline, which often produce emotionally distant and punishing relationships (Desai & Gupta, 2017). Conversely, authoritative child-rearing, which combines emotional warmth with firm guidance, fosters healthier interactions and diminishes the chance of any envy responses within the dyads. However, these authoritative means are far less common in India, especially within lower socioeconomic strata wherein limited resources and high stress reinforce the models of hierarchy and obedience (Gupta & Sharma, 2022). Thus, these interpersonal expressions, especially those concerning vulnerable feelings of envy, remain suppressed, which cultivates passive-aggressive behavior or relational withdrawal. Positive

relationships between children and their parents impact children's emotional, academic, and social growth. Some research observes that nurturing relationships foster academic resilience, increase self-efficacy, and promote emotional intelligence (Chutia, 2024; Solanki & Jyotsana, 2024). On the other hand, a fractured parent-child relationship, sometimes due to unresolved conflicts stemming from envy or control issues, exacerbates stress, aggression, and feelings of alienation in children.

Gender differences add to complications where daughters face an overprotective or envious response when they get freedoms never granted to their mothers, whereas sons face expectations of performance and success due to envy (Das & Roy, 2017). In the private sphere of an urban nuclear family, this could be manifested as micromanagement; emotional ambivalence; or, more covertly, the undermining of the child's capacity for success.

Despite its increased centrality, very little research on parental envy in an Indian context exists. Most studies are focused on general parenting styles, family construct, or adolescent behavior, not recognizing envy as a distinct emotional driver. This absence of focused research severely limits the understanding of how envy breaks emotional bonds and interferes with family functioning. Given India's shifting socio-cultural landscape marked with rapid urbanization, youth said to be independent for all purposes, and digital penetration, there is an urgent need for interventions designed with cultural sensitivity that address the emotional backdrops of parenting. Families would thus be able to recognize or put jealousy into a perspective as variants of unresolved grief or unmet needs, as opposed to animosity against one another through emotional literacy, parent therapy, and methods of open communication. Filling this gap would even bolster family relationships and nurture child development within the modern Indian societal domain.

2.1. Research Gaps

Although parent-child relationships have been extensively studied, there exists an interstice of research concentrating on parental envy in the Indian context. Most extant studies ignore inclusion of Indian participants or address their unique cultural values of collectivism, patriarchy, and academic impositions towards the formation of or in accentuating this emotion. Besides, there is scant knowledge on differential implications of parental envy onto sons and daughters when gender factors

into Indian parenting dynamics. However, nothing is known about how parental experiences of envy can influence the mental health of both the parents and the children they raise. Seen as emotional fallout, guilt, anxiety, or impaired attachment rarely find any place in the discourse. These types of cross-cultural comparisons tend to label parental envy as a Western concept, thus resulting in its underacknowledged status in Indian families. Hence, it is high time for culturally sensitive research and interventions that legitimize parental envy as a real and influential component in family life.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Aim

This study aims to examine how parental envy is associated with parent-child relationship quality in the Indian cultural context and to assess gender-based differences in benign and malicious forms of parental envy

3.2 Research Questions

1. Is there a significant relationship between levels of parental envy and the quality of the parent-child relationship?
2. Are there significant gender differences in the experience and expression of parental envy?

3.3 Research Objectives

1. To study the relationship between Parental Envy on the quality of relationships between parents and children.
2. To study the gender differences in Parental Envy.

3.4 Variables

Independent Variable: Parental Envy

Dependent Variable: Parent-Child Relationship

3.5 Hypotheses

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between Parental Envy and Parent-Child Relationship.

H0₂: There are no significant gender differences in Parental Envy.

3.6 Sample

The sample size for this research is 212. Through a selective-purposive sampling method, older adults who are educated and have children were chosen as the sample for this study. Men and women over the age of 30 were selected.

3.7 Inclusion Criteria

- Participants must be currently married.
- Participants must have at least one child and have been in a parental role for a minimum of two years.
- Participants must be between 30 and 60 years of age.
- Participants must be able to understand the purpose of the study and be adequately informed about how to complete the questionnaires.

3.8 Exclusion Criteria

- Divorced parents will be excluded from the study.
- Single parents (unmarried, widowed, or separated) will be excluded.
- Parents below the age of 30 will be excluded from participation.

3.9 Procedure

After selecting the sample, the Child-Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS-SF) and the Benign and Malicious Envy Scale (BeMaS) were sent via email to the subjects for their completion. A brief explanation was given for the study, which sought to explore the aspect of parental envy and child-parent relationship from the perspective of parents. Although the BeMaS is not case-specific to

parenting, participants were asked to think about envy felt towards their children. Informed consent was obtained online; ethical considerations were also taken into account in order to avoid causing any emotional disturbance or strain on family relations. The collected responses were scored and analyzed using correlational procedures, with findings then being presented in relation to the null hypotheses set forth.

3.10 Tools Used

- 1. Child-Parent Relationship Scale – Short Form (CPRS-SF)-** Developed by Driscoll and Pianta (2011), this 15-item scale assesses parental perceptions of closeness and conflict in the parent-child relationship. It uses a 5-point Likert scale. Conflict scores are calculated from items 2, 4, 8, 10–14, while closeness scores use items 1, 3, 5–7, 9, and 15. Reliability ranges from 0.70–0.90; validity ranges from 0.20–0.60.
- 2. Benign and Malicious Envy Scale (BeMaS)-** Created by Lange and Crusius (2015), this 10-item scale measures benign (self-improving) and malicious (hostile) envy using a Likert-type format. Though initially designed for peer contexts, it was adapted here to assess parental envy with caution. Benign envy is scored using items 1, 3, 4, 7, 9; malicious envy using items 2, 5, 6, 8, 10. The scale shows good reliability ($\alpha = 0.77–0.84$).

4. Results

Table 1: Showing the Descriptive Statistics for Child-Parent Relationship, Parental Envy

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
Closeness	27.87	7.92	7.000	35.000	-1.389	1.071
Conflict	17.36	6.32	8.000	33.000	0.652	-0.360
Benign Envy	15.07	5.68	5.000	30.000	0.218	-0.482
Malicious Envy	9.47	3.88	5.000	26.000	2.127	6.030

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. All variables significantly deviated from normality based

on the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p < .001$).

Descriptive

statistics were generated for various constructs: relational closeness, relational conflict, benign envy, and malicious envy. Closeness was reported with a mean of 27.87 (SD = 7.92), while the negative skewness (-1.39) assures that most of the parent participants had high relational closeness with their child. Conflict showed somewhat lower levels ($M = 17.36$, $SD = 6.32$) and was moderately skewed to the right (0.65), suggesting generally low but somewhat diverse perceptions of relational tensions. Benign envy produced a mean score of 15.07 ($SD = 5.68$), with an almost normal distribution (skewness = 0.22). Meanwhile, malicious envy had a mean score of 9.47 ($SD = 3.88$), with an extreme positive skew (2.13) and petty kurtosis (6.03), which was indicative of score clustering in the low range, with a few extreme high ones.

Table 2: Showing the Normality test for Child-Parent relationship, Parental Envy

Variable	Shapiro-Wilk W	p-value
Closeness	0.806	< .001***
Conflict	0.935	< .001***
Benign Envy	0.951	< .001***
Malicious Envy	0.790	< .001***

*Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$*

Shapiro-Wilk tests yielded significant values for non-normality for all variables tested ($p < .001$). So

for any correlational analysis, non-parametric tests such as Spearman's rho might well be appropriate to consider.

Table 3: Showing the Spearman's Correlations for Parental Envy

Variable	Mean	SD	Spearman's rho	p-value
Closeness	27.868	7.923	0.039	0.572
Conflict	17.358	6.317	0.170	0.013*
Parental Envy	24.542	8.029		

*Note. p-values. *p < .05. (statistically significant)*

This correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between envy and levels of closeness and conflict within the parent-child relationship. The correlation between parental envy and closeness was positive but small in magnitude, $r = .039$, $p = .572$, and nonsignificant; thus, high levels of parental envy do not seem to co-occur meaningfully with closeness in the parent-child relationship. In contrast, a significant positive correlation was found between parental envy and conflict, $r = .170$, $p = .013$. This finding suggests that the parents reporting higher envy also reported experiencing greater conflict with their children, although the relationship between the two variables was weak. These results suggest that parental envy may slightly foster conflict but does not necessarily diminish emotional closeness but does not necessarily diminish emotional closeness.

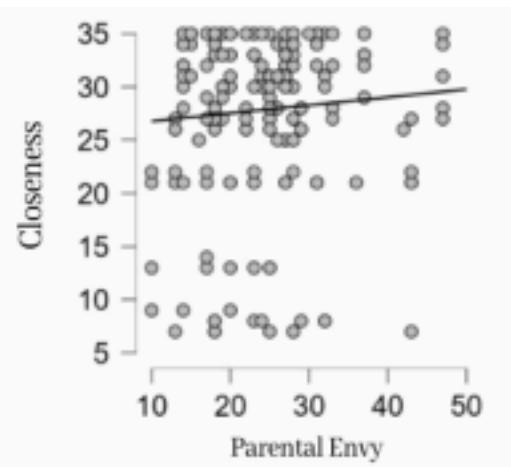


Figure 1.1: Showing Closeness against Parental Envy

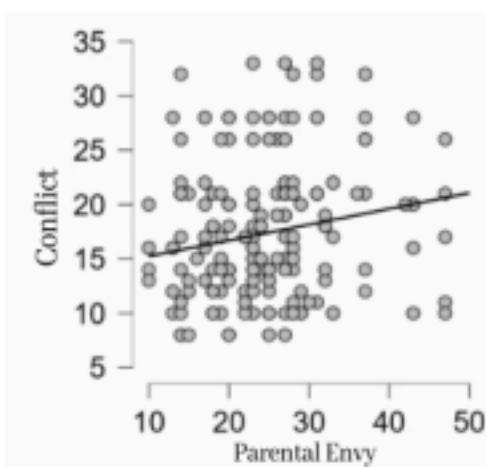


Figure 1.2: Showing Conflict against Parental Envy

Scatterplots shown above suggest a slight upward trend between persecutions, this confirm the findings, whereas there appears to be no clear pattern regarding closeness.

Table 4: Showing the Regression Analysis Predicting Closeness from Benign and Malicious Envy

Variable	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Beta β	f	df	p
Benign Envy	0.45	0.26	0.25	0.42	35.2	210	<0.001***
Malicious Envy				-0.21			<0.001***

Note. ***p < .001

A

Regression analysis was conducted to test if benign and malicious envy, being subdimensions of parental envy, significantly predicted Closeness in the parent-child relationship. The overall model proved to be statistically significant, with $F(2, 209) = 35.2$, $p < .001$, suggesting that both types of envy collectively do predict closeness. The model explained about 26% of the variance in closeness ($R^2 = .26$, Adjusted $R^2 = .25$), which is considered a medium effect size. Examining the two predictors individually: benign envy positively influenced closeness, $\beta = 0.42$, $p < .001$. This implies that when parents feel benign envy (or the kind of envy that motivates self-improvement), they ostensibly become emotionally closer to their children. Malicious envy, conversely, was negatively related to closeness, $\beta = -0.21$, $p < .001$, suggesting that parents who experience more malicious envy (resentment or ill will) perceive a lesser degree of emotional closeness to their children. Taken together, the findings show that the type of envy a parent feels toward a child does have an important

contribution to the quality of that emotional bond.

Table 5: Showing the Regression Analysis Predicting Conflict from Benign and Malicious Envy

Variable	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Beta β	f	df	p
Benign Envy	0.49	0.24	0.23	0.31	31.8	210	<0.001***
Malicious Envy				0.35			<0.001***

Note. *** $p < .001$

Regression analysis was conducted to determine whether Benign Envy and Malicious Envy, as subdimensions of Parental Envy, significantly predicted Conflict in the parent-child relationship. The model as a whole was statistically significant, $F(2, 209) = 31.8, p < .001$. Hence, both types of envy meaningfully predict levels of conflict together. It explained 24% of the variance in parent-child conflict ($R^2 = .24$, Adjusted $R^2 = .23$), a moderate effect size. Examining each predictor's individual effects: Benign Envy positively predicted conflict, $\beta = 0.31, p < .001$. This implies that even the so-called well-intentioned envy-for instance, envy born out of admiration or motivation to improve-may increase parent-child conflict. Malicious Envy also showed a positive prediction toward parent-child conflict with $\beta = 0.35, p < .001$. It could mean that the more resentful or hostile a parent becomes toward the child's success or traits, the higher the conflict between them will arise. These findings illustrate that although the so-called positive envy can exacerbate tension or disagreements among parents and children. This can happen due to unspoken feelings or unmet expectations at the parents' end.

Table 6: Showing Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Gender Differences in Conflict, Closeness, Benign Envy, and Malicious Envy

Group	Gender	N	Median (IQR)	SD	Mean Rank	U	Z	P-Value
Conflict	Female	145	18	6.445	112.703	4231.5	-2.03	0.042*
	Male	67	16	5.847	93.075			
Closeness	Female	145	28	7.614	107.269	4567.0	-1.06	0.287
	Male	67	27	8.593	104.836			
Benign Envy	Female	145	15	5.880	109.200	4402.0	-1.57	0.115
	Male	67	14	5.217	100.657			
Malicious Envy	Female	145	9	3.633	101.883	3905.0	2.16	0.031*
	Male	67	10	4.354	116.493			

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

A

series of Mann–Whitney U tests were performed to investigate the differences observed in gender for perceived conflict, closeness, benign envy, and malicious envy. There was a statistically significant difference in conflict scores between females (Median = 18) and males (Median = 16), $U = 4231.5$, $Z = -2.03$, $p = .042$. Females, with a higher mean rank of 112.70 compared to males' 93.08, considered their parent-child relationship to be more conflictual than did males. Likewise, there was no gender difference for perceived closeness, $U = 4567.0$, $Z = -1.06$, $p = .287$. Among males and females, closeness was reported almost equally. The data did not yield a significant result for benign envy either, albeit females again showed slightly higher mean ranks, $U = 4402.0$, $Z = -1.57$, $p = .115$. This indicates that benign envy is not strongly influenced by gender. On the other hand, malicious envy showed a statistically significant gender difference, $U = 3905.0$, $Z = 2.16$, $p = .031$. Males recorded a higher male rank (116.49) than females (101.88), signifying that males stated significantly higher scores for malicious envy as compared to females.

Table 7: Hypotheses testing results

Hypothesis Code	Statement	Key Findings	Statistical Outcome

H0 ₁	There is no significant relationship between parental envy and parent-child relationship.	Weak but significant positive correlation found ($\rho = 0.162, p = .019$). Benign envy correlated with conflict ($\rho = 0.171, p = .013$); no relation with closeness.	Partially Rejected
H0 ₂	There is no significant gender difference in parental envy.	Males scored higher on malicious envy ($p = .031$); no gender difference for benign envy ($p = .115$). Mothers reported higher conflict ($p = .042$).	Partially Rejected

5. Discussion

5.1 Discussion for Hypothesis H0₁: Parental Envy and Parent-Child Relationship

Partial rejection of the first hypothesis (H0₁), which stated that there is no significant relationship between parental envy and parent-child relationships. Results showed a weak but positive significant association ($\rho = 0.162, p = .019$), i.e., paradoxically, better parent-child relationships can coexist with mild envy. This is consistent with Crusius and Lange (2014), who distinguish benign envy as motivating and non-destructive, while malicious envy implies harm and competition.

Interestingly, neither type of envy was significant in relation to closeness, suggesting that the emotional warmth may remain intact despite the presence of envy, probably because of cultural norms within Indian parenting that uphold family obligations above personal feelings (Verma & Singh, 2019). Nevertheless, benign envy was significantly positively correlated with conflict ($\rho = 0.171, p = .013$), implying that this good-intentioned envy can cause tension if left unchecked. The very strong correlation between benign and malicious envy ($\rho = 0.375, p < .001$) supports the evolutionary notion

of envy as an affective state trailing along a continuum and mutating when stressful conditions or unsatisfied needs alter the motivational force (Van de Ven et al., 2011).

The findings hint that in Indian collectivist families, envy, especially if denied, can subtly strain parent-child relationships by inducing conflict while preserving emotional closeness. Enhancing emotional awareness among parents may alleviate such conflicts while fostering healthier relationships (Fang et al., 2024).

5.2 Discussion for Hypothesis H0₂: Gender Differences in Parental Envy

The second hypothesis (H02), which posited no gender differences in parental envy, is also partially rejected. Males scored significantly higher on malicious envy ($p = .031$), while no gender difference was established for benign envy ($p = .115$). This may mean that fathers could probably be prone to ego-threat-based envy because of societal pressure about success and authority (Das & Roy, 2017; Lange & Crusius, 2015).

While women scored lower in malicious envy, they reported higher levels of conflict with the children ($p = .042$). This may mark relational stress, not hostility. Maternal envy may arise from caregiving stress or internalized expectations (Shek & Cheung, 2020). Despite these emotional differences, there was no significant difference in the closeness level between mothers and fathers ($p = .287$), possibly attributed to cultural prioritization of family ties.

In conclusion, while envy is common between genders, its nature and manifestation are different. These patterns further underscore the need to address emotional dynamics within parenting, especially for fathers who tend to suppress or internalize malicious envy. Possible gendered intervention avenues could curb conflicts and promote healthy emotional dialogues.

5.3 Key Findings

- With regard to closeness, the type of envy did not matter, and no gender differences were noted. The presence of both types of envy served to cause conflict and this was noted more in mothers.
- Benign envy was related to both closeness and conflict and was similarly experienced by both mothers and fathers.

- Malicious envy brought about conflict but no closeness and was found to be greater in fathers.

CONCLUSION

The study has each of its findings that benign parental envy modestly increases friction in parent-child relationships in the Indian context, without reducing emotional closeness. The weak yet significant correlation points to the possibility of complex emotional dynamics wherein stronger bonds may coexist with a subtle form of envy. Gender differences appeared: females reported high levels of conflict and closeness, while men showed much higher levels of malicious envy. This finding contemplates the study of collectivist values and gender norms in emotional expression. The study further lends validity to the use of CPRS-SF and BeMaS in this context while partially supporting both hypotheses.

Implications

- **Theoretical:** Support to Social Comparison Theory in the sense that upward comparisons unsettle family dynamics in collectivist cultures.
- **Practical:** Programs aiming at teaching parenting may want to incorporate aspects of regulating envy to decrease conflict and allow for more emotional closeness.
- **Cultural:** The conclusion arises that counseling must be culturally aware, where collectivism and gender roles have to be taken into account.
- **Educational:** Schools can offer parent workshops on managing envy and developing healthy interactions.
- **Clinical:** The results can enable the therapist to develop interventions involving parental self-esteem and emotion regulation.
- **Research:** This strong correlation between benign envy and malicious envy deserves a closer look at interference.

Limitations

- The cross-cultural and qualitative studies on parental envy are rather lacking.

- Socioeconomic and rural-urban differences pertinent to such issues have also not been fully taken into consideration.

Scope for Further Research

- Examine cultural and socioeconomic differences in parental envy using qualitative methods.
- Future studies could explore the urban-rural and gendered experiences of envy to a greater depth.

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