Burnt Toast and Harsh Talk Vs. French Toast and Sweet Talk – What Child Gender Gotta Do Here?

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of child gender on parental satisfaction/happiness taking into consideration parent gender using Health and Retirement Study (HRS) data. This study finds that in mid and late life mothers have higher child-domain satisfaction if they have first-born daughter or any daughter in the household, fathers are most satisfied if they have both son and daughter. We further find that 1) Mothers in the 'daughters-only' category express significantly higher level of understanding, openness, contact and trust with their kids than their counterparts in 'sons-only' category. 2) Fathers in the 'daughters-only' subgroup do express significantly greater contact with kids than their counterparts in 'son- only' group; however fathers in 'both girl-boy' category show greatest satisfaction. 3) Both parents show greater contact if the 'first-born' is a daughter. Studying this relation is important from both parent and child perspective as this might affect *inter-vivo* transfers, parental time and resource allocation for kids and grandkids on one hand; and parental well-being on the other. Especially keeping in view that more young Americans will be looking after their elderly parents as the baby boomer cohort gets older, this study becomes timely today (Lundberg et al. 2007b).

Findings of my study are complementary to the increasing parental investment in daughter-only households (Kornrich and Furstenberg 2013) and tend to reconcile the past inconsistencies of results on the ground that it is important to study parent-gender specific impact of child-gender.

Keywords: Child Gender, Parental Happiness

Introduction

Existing research in the area of 'child-gender and parents' focuses either on intra-household resource and time allocation (Gugl and Welling 2012; Kornrich and Furstenberg 2013; Lhila and Simon 2008; Mammen 2011); or parental labor market participation (Angrist and Evans 1998; Lundberg and Rose 2002a; Pabilonia and Ward-Batts 2007); or on a variety of parental marital outcomes like parental marital satisfaction and stability (Dahl and Moretti 2004; Mammen 2008), marriage formation among cohabitating couples (Lundberg and Rose 2003b), fathers' involvement in child rearing (Lundberg, McLanahan and Rose 2007a) and probability of future subsequent fertility[1] (Angrist and Evans 1998). However, impact of child gender on parental happiness has received much less attention. Even if some studies do exist, they either investigate the average effects of number of kids on happiness or compare parental happiness (irrespective of child gender and parent gender) with their childless counterparts. Furthermore, inconsistent findings in the comparison of the parental happiness with their childless counterparts add more to the mystery. Lack of child-gender and parent-gender specific considerations might have been the reason behind inconsistent findings in the past. To the best of my knowledge I came across only one study which takes into account the child gender specific effect on parental happiness using Canadian nationally representative data (Pushkar et al. 2013). However, even this study does not take into consideration parent-gender.

My study focuses on child gender impact on child-domain specific parental satisfaction/ happiness in mid-life and elderly Americans. Subsequent on findings, this study further

[1] Studies have found that parents of a son are more likely to marry if they were cohabitating and birth of a son speeds the transition into marriage when the child is born before the mother's first marriage (Lundberg and Rose, 2003); parents of sons are less likely to divorce as compared to parents of a daughter in American households. Furthermore, Dahl and Moretti (2008) find that first born daughter is 3.5 percent less likely to be living with her father as compared to the first-born son.

investigates whether there is gender difference in child gender impact on parental happiness, that is, if child gender impact on mothers varies from that on fathers.

This study contributes to literature in the following ways: 1) Existing literature compares parental happiness with their nonparent counterparts irrespective of child gender, whereas this study finds out that child gender specific comparisons tend to explain inconsistencies in the past findings of fertility impact on happiness. 2) This article further addresses whether there are gender differences in child-gender effect; that is, whether the impact of child-gender on happiness varies for mothers from that of fathers. To the best of our knowledge none of the prior studies has done this and our findings indicate that this difference is important. 3) This is the first study investigating the impact of child gender on parental happiness using the U.S. data. The previously existing study uses Canadian nationally representative data (Pushkar et al. 2013). 4) This is the first article to study the impact of child gender on mid-age and elderly Americans. As per census population projections, as the baby boomers get older, the 'old' (65+ as well as 85+) to 'adults below 65' ratio is going to rise in the U.S. It implies that more and more young Americans are (and will be) looking after their elderly parents as the baby boomer cohort gets older (Lundberg et al. 2007b). Hence, it becomes timely as well as important to study the relation between child gender and parental happiness in mid and old age.

This study has relevance for family and demographic economics as understanding the relation between child gender and parental happiness in mid-age and old-age is important since it plays an important role in *inter-vivos* transfers, retirement planning and parental resource and time allocation for children and grandchildren.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows: Section Two discusses the impact of child gender on parental behavioral outcomes. Section Three presents our theoretical arguments.

In Section Four we describe the data and empirical methods used. Section Five presents the empirical results from our analysis, including some robustness checks. In Section Six we conclude and discuss directions for further work.

II. Child Gender and Parental Happiness

Child gender effect on parental happiness is rather under-investigated. There are number of studies on effect of 'fertility in-general' on parental happiness but only one on 'child gender specific' impact on parental happiness (Pushkar et al. 2013). Furthermore, literature finds mixed/inconsistent results even for the impact of 'fertility in-general' on parental happiness (Margolis and Myrskylä 2011; Rempel 1985). On one hand there are studies which find that having a child increases happiness, life satisfaction and social ties (Gallagher and Gerstel 2001; Margolis and Myrskylä 2011; Umberson and Gove 1989) but on the other hand we have findings showing that child bearing can strain psychological well-being (McLanahan and Adams 1987; Rempel 1985) (Rempel 1985; Ross, Mirowsky and Goldsteen 1990).

MaRgolis and MyRskyla (2011) investigate the relation between fertility and subjective well-being across countries. They find that 'above age 40' respondents with children are happier than respondents without children. They hold that the negative association between childbearing and happiness in prime fertility years gets mitigated in later years.

Literature also finds that women and men experience the transition to parenthood differently. Women have been found to experience more stress and have higher mental health costs of having children as compared to men (Scott and Alwin 1989; Simon 1992).

However, all of these studies have been done irrespective of child gender except the one by Pushkar et al. using Canadian nationally representative data (Pushkar et al. 2013).

Inconsistent findings in the fertility effect on parental happiness might be indicative of the need to consider both the child gender as well as the parent gender in future research to reconcile the results.

III. Theory

There are several channels through which child gender may impact parental happiness. This study is based on the two channels –1) difference in utility produced by a son vs. a daughter 2) difference in production function produced by son vs. daughter. This section elaborates the two channels:

III.1 Theory Behind Child-Gender Impact in Parental Life:

Parental Preference:

Parents either derive utility (a) directly from child consumption, and time input, or (b) indirectly when child utility enters into own utility function. Utility derived may vary over child-gender based on parental child gender preference.

Let us suppose parent utility is given by U^p:

$$u^p(q^{p=1}\, q^{p=2}\, q^k\, t^{p=1}\, t^{p=2}\, Q) = U^p$$

Superscript p stands for parent and k for kid where p = 1(mom) or 2 (dad);

k = 1(daughter) or 2 (son).

Where $q^k = Kid's\ Private\ Consumption$

$$q^{p=1} = Mother's\ Private\ Consumption$$

$$q^{p=2} = Father's\ Private\ Consumption$$

$$Q = Household\ Public\ Consumption$$

$$t^p = Time\ Input\ by\ Parents$$

If parent has pure child gender preference, q^k and t^p might vary over child gender.[2]

Or parent can derive utility (b) indirectly given that parental utility is the function of child utility with some *'weight'* where the 'weight' might vary over child gender.

Let us take a simple case in which kid's utility is given by:

$$u^k(q^k t^p Q) = U^k$$

Where $q^k = Kid's\ Private\ Consumption$

$$Q = Kid's\ Public\ Consumption$$

$$t^p = Time\ spent\ with\ Parents$$

Parents derive utility from kids. Then parent p's preferences can be defined *recursively* as:

$$u^p(q^p q^k t^p Q) + k^p u^k(q^k t^p Q) = U^p$$

Where

$k^p = weight\ given\ by\ parent\ p\ to\ kid's\ (k)\ utility\ based\ on\ parent\ p's\ preferences$

If parents have child-gender preference, they have different weight for a son than that for a daughter.

III.2 Constraint/ Cost Difference

Child gender impact on parents can also be the result of gender specific cost difference/constraint in raising a child. Child production function varies over child gender. Child quality is the output of parental time and resource allocation. Existing literature suggests that

[2] For instance, empirically fathers have been found to derive higher utility by investing time in son vs. a daughter. See for further details: Gugl, E.and L. Welling. 2012. "Time with sons and daughters." *Review of Economics of the Household* 10(2):277-298. ibid., Lundberg, S., S. McLanahan, and E. Rose. 2007a. "Child gender and father involvement in fragile families." *Demography* 44(1):79-92, Lundberg, S., S.W. Pabilonia, and J. Ward-Batts. "Time allocation of parents and investments in sons and daughters." Working paper, ibid., Mammen, K. 2011. "Fathers' time investments in children: do sons get more?" *Journal of Population Economics* 24(3):839-871.

boys need more inputs (specifically time input)[3] as compared to girls for the same level of output (child quality). Furthermore, it is cheaper to produce child quality of girls than boys especially when wage rate of mother is lower than father since time of same-sex parent has been found to be more productive than opposite-sex parent in terms of child quality (Gugl and Welling 2012). This also serves an explanation for the findings in the literature for mothers being constrained with the presence of father in the household for better upbringing of sons. There seems to be a support for the constraint based model about the importance of fathers for the long-term development of sons in Fragile Families and Child Well-being studies data used by Lundberg, McLanahan and Rose (Lundberg et al. 2007a).

Child-Parent Relationship In Mid-life and Older Age

If we look at the utility and cost perspective of child-gender impact on parent in mid-life and older age across the globe, we can hypothesize that parents may derive higher utility when the caregiver is a daughter since daughters have been found to feel more responsible and concerned about providing care to parents in the literature (Hequembourg and Brallier 2005; Lye 1996; Mui 1995). Whereas, on the other hand, cost of seeking caregiving from a married son may vary from that of a married daughter over different cultures also (Chan 2005). In some cultures (mostly in South Asia), parents depend on sons for their old age care. Moreover, parental cost of marriage of a son may vary from that of a daughter. For instance, in some cultures parents have to pay a price in the form of 'Dowry' at the time of their daughter's marriage (India) whereas in other cultures there is a bride price (China, Thailand, Mahr/Mehr/Mahriah in Islamic countries). Specifically in these cultures, the cost of raising a daughter may vary from that of a son depending upon the traditions of that culture.

[3] Boys fare worse following parental divorce (Lundberg, S. 2005. "Sons, daughters, and parental behaviour." *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 21:340+. Hetherington, E.M.and J. Kelly. 2003. *For better or for worse: Divorce reconsidered*: WW Norton & Company.

Hypotheses:

This study tests the following hypotheses taking into consideration the parent gender:

1. Mothers in 'daughter-only' category are more satisfied in the child domain specific satisfaction measures than their counterparts in 'son-only' category.
2. Parents in 'both boy-girl' category are more satisfied in the child domain specific satisfaction measures than their counterparts in 'daughter-only' and 'son-only' category.

IV. Empirical Framework and Data

We are estimating a standard econometrics equation with current well-being as the dependent variable and child gender along with the usual socio-economic demographic variables as controls.

$$Happiness_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta_1\, child\ gender_{it} + \beta_3\, X_{it} + \mu_i + \varepsilon_{it} \qquad (1)$$

We are analyzing the effect of child gender on current parental happiness (H_{it}) controlling for a vector of socio-economic demographic controls (X_{it}) which might impact happiness.

Exogeneity of Child Gender:

Assuming there are no sex-selective abortions, child gender of the first born is exogenous, however future fertility (whether parents are going to have next child or not) depends upon the gender of first-born. Furthermore, since child-gender seems to have an impact on partnership status of parents (sons increase the probability of marriage and reduce the probability of divorce), as well as future fertility. Child-gender after the first born child cannot be treated as exogenous. Therefore, this study also compares happiness of parents in 'first-born daughter'

category with their counterparts in ‘first-born son’ category controlling for number of biological kids.

Data

I use four waves (2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010) of nationally representative longitudinal HRS data. Earlier waves could not be included for lack of child-domain specific satisfaction measures. I dropped proxy interviews and sample with no biological kids. Cohabitating partners of individuals who were age-eligible were included in my study.

Child-Domain Specific Satisfaction/Happiness Variables

Child-domain specific happiness measures used in this study are as follows:

1. How much do children really understand the way you feel about things?
2. How much can you rely on children if you have a serious problem?
3. How much can you open up to children if you need to talk about your worries?
4. Contact Index with kids which includes following three questions:
    4.1. Meet up with kids
    4.2. Speak on the phone
    4.3. Write an email

However, these questions were asked from a subset of sample only after 2004. Analyses are based on the sub-sample from which child-domain specific satisfaction questions were asked. I control for financial status, education, marital status, parent age, average age of children, retirement status, race and self-reported health.

Results

Table-1 provides the descriptive statistics of the HRS sub-sample from whom child-domain specific satisfaction questions were asked. Table-1 shows that though fathers have a higher general happiness level than mothers on an average, but mothers have higher child-domain specific satisfaction on an average.

Table – 1 insert here.

Table-2 provides descriptive statistics based on child and parent gender. Although both parents have higher child-domain satisfaction in the 'both girl-boy' category but mothers in 'daughter-only' category have higher mean for all the four indicators of child domain satisfaction: contact index, understanding, reliability and openness than their counterparts in 'son-only' category as opposed to fathers having higher level of understanding in 'son-only' category. Later we find out significant difference in the regression coefficients also.

Table – 2 insert here.

Table-3 gives maximum likelihood estimator in panel regressions of child-domain specific satisfaction measures by child and parent gender with bootstrapped standard errors reported underneath the coefficients. Columns -2 compares 'daughter-only' mothers with 'son-only' mothers (comparing child-domain satisfaction among mothers of 'only-daughter/s' and mothers of 'only-son/s'.) and column-5 presents results of comparison between fathers with 'daughter-only' category and those of 'son-only' category. Dependent variables are various child-domain specific satisfaction measures. I control for financial status, average age of kids, parents' age, race education, marital status, retirement status and self-reported health.

Table-3 insert here

Column-2 in table-3 shows that mothers in 'daughter-only Vs. son-only' category have positive and significant coefficients for all the child-domain specific satisfaction measures. However, coefficient for general happiness is positive but not significant. In Column-5 fathers have positive and significant coefficient only for contact index implying that daughters have more contact with their parents irrespective of parent gender. Columns -3 and 6 compare 'daughter-only' mothers with 'both girl-boy' mothers and 'daughter-only' fathers with ''both girl-boy' fathers respectively. Mothers in 'daughter-only' category have higher level of understanding as compared to their counterparts with both sons and daughters. However, mixed-sex (both girl-boy) kids have even higher contact with both parents than daughters (coefficient on daughter vs. 'both girl-boy' for contact index is negative and significant). Columns -4 and 7 compare 'son-only' mothers with 'both girl-boy' mothers and 'son-only' fathers with 'both girl-boy' fathers respectively. Column-4 and 7 have negative and significant coefficients for all the dependent variables implying that parents in 'both girl-boy' category have higher level of child satisfaction as compared to their counterparts with only sons irrespective of parent gender. Furthermore, mothers have higher level of general happiness as well as compared to their counterparts with only sons.

Table-4 insert here

There are some concerns about the endogeneity of child-gender after the first child. I repeat the analysis with the first-born daughter vs. first-born son controlling for number of biological kids. Results are given in table-4. Mothers with the first-born daughter have positive and significant coefficients for all the child-domain specific satisfaction measures while fathers

have a significant coefficient only for contact-index. However, coefficient for general happiness is not significant for wither parent.

Robustness Checks

Several robustness checks have been done. Keeping in view the complex survey design nature of HRS data, analyses were also done with survey weights using 'svy subpopulation' commands in stata12. Poisson regressions were run keeping in view the count variable nature of contact index. Furthermore, MLE regressions were re-run using different subsets of data based on number of biological kids. None of the above change the validity of results presented here. Author is willing to share results of all robustness checks if needed.

IV. Conclusion and Discussion

Irrespective of parent gender, daughters have more contact with their parents and both parents prefer 'both girl-boy' than having 'only sons'. Mothers report that daughters not only have more contact with parents but also provide more understanding, reliance and openness. Furthermore, mothers in 'daughter-only' category are more satisfied in their mid and late life as compared to their counterparts in 'son-only' category irrespective of number of daughters. Comparing first-borns, we find that first-born daughter provides higher level of overall child-satisfaction than first-born son for American mothers. Irrespective of child gender as well as parent gender, Americans have hard time opening to their kids about their worries on an average. However, mothers in 'daughter-only' households open up more as compared to 'son-only' counterparts. Both parents prefer 'both girl-boy' kid composition, however, mothers seem to be at an advantage in 'daughter-only' households so far as understanding and openness is concerned. However, fathers have more understanding if they have both son and daughter.

Higher child-domain satisfaction in daughter and 'both girl-boy' households (as compared to son-only counterparts) may also explain the increasing parental investment in daughter-only households in recent past.

We do find same-sex kid preference by parents (mothers having higher satisfaction with daughters and fathers happier with sons) in the middle and old aged cohorts in the U.S. Vigorous research is needed to check whether this preference is cost-driven or utility-driven.

Child -domain specific parental satisfaction level affects parental emotional and physical well-being in late life. Since more young Americans will be looking after their elderly parents as the baby boomer cohort gets older and starts retiring in 2013, this study becomes timely.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics Father Vs. Mother

	Father	Mother	Type of Variable
Contact Index	4.180 (5.736)	4.443 (6.088)	Count 0-16 (Sum of three: email, phone, meet)
Rely	3.398 (0.862)	3.558 (0.747)	1-4 (1-least, 4-Maximum)
Understand	3.152 (0.800)	3.266 (0.771)	1-4 (1-least, 4-Maximum)
Happiness	0.898 (0.303)	0.862 (0.345)	Binary (0-1)
Openness	3.009 (0.920)	3.257 (0.830)	1-4 (1-least, 4-Maximum)
Self-Reported Health	2.712 (1.053)	2.781 (1.071)	1-5 (1-least, 5-Maximum)
Age	68.049 (9.571)	66.973 (10.270)	
Education	13.121 (4.359)	12.522 (3.752)	
# of Biological Kids	2.911 (1.604)	3.033 (1.713)	
Average Age of Kids	38.276 (10.281)	40.43 (10.615)	
Observations	6,157	10,327	

Table 2: Child-domain Specific Mean Satisfaction Measures by Child Gender: Father Vs. Mother

	Mother			Father		
Happiness	**Daughters**	**Sons**	**Mixed**	**Daughters**	**Sons**	**Mixed**
Contact Index	4.313	4.159	4.574	4.140	4.000	4.256
	(6.114)	(5.781)	(6.171)	(5.821)	(5.566)	(5.766)
Rely	3.545	3.423	3.605	3.333	3.309	3.450
	(0.792)	(0.841)	(0.693)	(0.917)	(0.891)	(0.830)
Understand	3.315	3.155	3.286	3.100	3.108	3.184
	(0.766)	(0.820)	(0.752)	(0.851)	(0.806)	(0.780)
Happy	0.851	0.858	0.866	0.873	0.895	0.906
	(0.356)	(0.348)	(0.340)	(0.332)	(0.306)	(0.291)
Openness	3.267	3.145	3.290	2.955	2.947	3.048
	(0.871)	(0.872)	(0.799)	(0.980)	(0.947)	(0.889)
Observations	1,935	2,039	6,347	1,168	1,295	3,690

Table 3: MLE Panel Regressions of Child-Domain Specific Satisfaction Measures by Child and Parent Gender:

	Mother			Father		
Dependent Variable: Child-Domain Satisfaction	**Only Daughters Vs. Only Sons**	**Only Daughters Vs. Mixed Sex Kids**	**Only Sons Vs. Mixed Sex Kids**	**Only Daughters Vs. Only Sons**	**Only Daughters Vs. Mixed Sex Kids**	**Only Sons Vs. Mixed Sex Kids**
Contact Index	0.636***	-0.489***	-1.126***	0.732***	-0.015	-0.760***
	(0.120)	(0.120)	(0.094)	(0.210)	(0.096)	(0.219)
Understand	0.164***	0.052**	-0.114***	0.022	-0.037	-0.062***
	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.021)	(0.038)	(0.026)	(0.022)
Rely	0.130***	-0.022	-0.152***	0.041	-0.069*	-0.109***
	(0.027)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.047)	(0.042)	(0.029)
Openness	0.117***	0.006	-0.118***	0.018	-0.064	-0.077**
	(0.032)	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.054)	(0.052)	(0.030)
General Happiness	0.001	-0.014	-0.022**	-0.010	-0.028	-0.016
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.011)

Bootstrapped standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Table reports maximum likelihood coefficients controlling for financial status, average age of kids, parents' age, race education, marital status, retirement status and self-reported health.

Table 4: MLE Panel Regressions of Child-Domain Specific Satisfaction Measures by First-Born Child Gender and Parent Gender:

First Born Daughter Vs. Son	Contact Index	Understand	Rely	Openness	General Happiness
Father	0.332***	0.026	0.018	0.006	0.004
	(0.112)	(0.020)	(0.024)	(0.019)	(0.007)
Mother	0.298***	0.062***	0.029**	0.041**	-0.003
	(0.071)	(0.017)	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.005)

Bootstrapped standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Table reports Maximum Likelihood coefficients for those who have First-Born daughters as compared to those with first-born sons controlling for financial status, number of biological kids, average age of kids, parents' age, race education, marital status, retirement status and self-reported health.