

SONS, DAUGHTERS, AND FAMILY PROCESSES: Does Gender of Children Matter?

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■ **Abstract** In the United States, parents prefer a child of each gender, and on many dimensions parents tend to treat sons and daughters similarly. However, fathers' investments appear to be somewhat higher in families with sons. Fathers spend more time with sons than with daughters. Fathers more often marry and stay married and mothers report more marital happiness in families with sons—although associations are weakening and differentials are not large. Divorced fathers more often have custody of sons than of daughters. Daughters do more housework than sons, mirroring the gendered division of labor in adulthood. Parental support of educational activities varies, with some parental behaviors greater for sons but others higher for daughters. Whether parents encourage gender differences or whether children's gender-differentiated behaviors elicit differential parental treatment cannot be easily determined with studies to date, most of which are cross-sectional or limited in other ways that hamper conclusions about causal mechanisms.

INTRODUCTION

Research on gender differences within the family is most often about the adults in the family. A voluminous literature describes and theorizes about the differences between husbands and wives in the relative amount of money they earn, the household work they do, and the power they wield. With the exception of research on child development, the influence of children's gender has not been a major focus of the literature on gender, work, and family in the United States. In fact, the influence of gender of child on family life is usually reserved for discussions of South and East Asian countries, where preferences for sons are so strong that parents disproportionately abort female fetuses, invest more resources in the health of their sons, and sometimes resort to female infanticide. These practices often strike U.S. observers as shocking, and few sociological studies entertain the idea that Americans have a son preference. Given that the sex ratio in the United States is generally even (Pollard & Morgan 2002), the motivation for studies

of son preference in the United States has been limited. Yet, there are a number of intriguing questions about U.S. parents' possible differential treatment of children by gender and the effects of gender composition of siblings on child and adult outcomes.

A question of great interest to social psychologists is how individuals form gender-differentiated self-concepts and come to define behaviors as more appropriate for one gender than the other. In addition, why does differentiation in adult time allocation by gender remain so persistent and does it have its roots in differential socialization and parental treatment of sons and daughters in the family? Despite trends toward greater similarity in adult behaviors, men continue to devote more time to market work and achieve higher occupational attainment and greater earnings, and women devote more time to childrearing and unpaid market work, thereby achieving less occupational success and having lower earnings as adults [variously referred to as the "family gap" (Waldfogel 1998) or the "motherhood wage penalty" (Budig & England 2001)]. Are these gender-differentiated adult behaviors rooted, at least partially, in gender constructions that begin in the parental home (West & Zimmerman 1987)? Social psychologists and child developmental scientists suggest that a gendered self-concept emerges through a mix of social learning, biological predispositions, and gender role modeling processes that take place within the family and that result in schemas for appropriate male and female behavior and choices.

Further, sociological inquiry typically considers how social context alters behaviors. One's family of origin, including the gender composition of one's sibship, is one of the earliest social contexts in which interaction is embedded. Whether the gender composition of one's sibship aids or hinders educational attainment is a question that intrigues researchers who study inequality, as noted by Steelman et al. (2002) in their recent *Annual Review* article on sibship composition. A number of family behaviors—completed family size, entry and exit from marriage, and contact and support of children by nonresident fathers—have been linked either to children's gender or the gender composition of the sibship. Much of this body of research examines whether parents, especially fathers, make greater investments when the family includes sons rather than daughters.

In recent years, researchers working within the traditions of sociology, psychology, education, child development, family studies, and economics have examined child's gender in the context of selected family processes. The studies have yielded a number of surprising findings, indicating that gender of child may be associated with a wide range of child outcomes and parental behaviors. Our goal is to review the variety of domains where gender of child may matter for parents and their children and to evaluate the strength of the evidence. Is the gender composition of sibships implicated in differential parental treatment of children and/or differential outcomes for sons and daughters? Does the evidence suggest that gender of child is becoming a less significant factor influencing family processes over time as we move to a more gender egalitarian normative climate, and perhaps also to more androgynous childrearing practices?

We organize the review around a set of provocative questions. First, is there evidence that parents prefer one gender over the other in U.S. society today? If there are preferences for sons or daughters, what might be the basis for those preferences? Second, whether or not parents prefer sons over daughters, is there evidence that they treat them differently? Here, we review the literature on parents' gender-differentiated interactions, involvement, encouragement, and affect toward children. Third, is there gender differentiation in the allocation of household chores, and might this be implicated in adult gender specialization in the home and the labor market? Fourth, are parental roles and employment patterns more conventional or more gender specialized in families with sons than in families with daughters? Fifth, do fathers and mothers spend more time with same-sex children (i.e., mothers with daughters, fathers with sons), and are fathers more invested in families with sons? Finally, how gender differentiated is adult children's caregiving to their elderly parents?

Our literature review focuses primarily on the United States, with limited reference to research in other developed countries. Differentiation by gender of child is much greater in developing countries, and a relatively large literature identifies the ways in which boys are much better treated than girls in a variety of settings. This is an important literature but one that is beyond the scope of this review and, indeed, is a topic that warrants its own separate review.

DO AMERICAN PARENTS PREFER SONS, DAUGHTERS, OR BOTH EQUALLY?

One test of whether parents prefer sons or daughters is to examine their fertility behavior in the context of their existing children. Are parents who already have girls more likely to have additional children in the hopes of attaining a boy? The strongest evidence for gender neutrality or gender egalitarianism is that Americans, and Europeans more generally, exhibit a strong preference for having one child of each gender (Andersson et al. 2006). Cohorts of U.S. parents (born in the early 1900s and later) with two children of the same sex were consistently more likely to have a third child than were parents with one son and one daughter (Pollard & Morgan 2002, Sloane & Lee 1983, Williamson 1976, Yamaguchi & Ferguson 1995), with one study showing parents were not only more likely to proceed to a third birth if they had children of the same sex, but they did so more quickly (Teachman & Schollaert 1989). In recent decades (the 1980s and 1990s), the relationship between the gender of parents' existing children and the probability of a third birth has weakened in the United States (Pollard & Morgan 2002). One interpretation is that recent U.S. cohorts of parents are less concerned about the gender of their children than in the past and may even be less interested in achieving the one girl, one boy norm that tended to dominate U.S. fertility behavior for so long.

However, a recent and somewhat controversial study by Dahl & Moretti (2004) argues that a number of pieces of evidence suggest that there continues to be a

preference for sons, at least among fathers in the United States. For example, they found that parents with two girls are somewhat more likely to proceed to a third birth than those with two boys and that the relatively higher likelihood of another birth in all girl versus all boy families increases with family size. They interpret this finding as consistent with a preference for sons over daughters.

Andersson et al. (2006) also found differences in Scandinavia in the probability of a third birth, given two children of the same sex. Interestingly, in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway there is greater likelihood of a third birth if the first two siblings are boys, whereas in Finland a third birth happens more often when there are two daughters. The authors take this as evidence of a daughter preference in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark and a son preference in Finland. However, the interpretation of third birth outcomes remains ambiguous. Dahl & Moretti (2004) note, for example, that parents may not prefer sons to daughters but may assume that daughters are more costly to raise. It is also possible to interpret different propensities for a third birth in the opposite way—parents with two girls may be more likely to have an additional child not because they desire a son but because they so enjoy their girl children that they desire another child.

The evidence on stated preferences for a child of a particular sex is perhaps more compelling. In Gallup Poll surveys, men are more than twice as likely to report a preference for a son than daughter (in answer to the hypothetical question: “Suppose you could only have one child. Would you prefer that it be a boy or girl?”). According to calculations by Dahl & Moretti (2004), 19% of men say girl but 48% say boy. Women, in comparison, show a slight preference for daughters over sons (35% versus 30%), a preference for daughters that is much stronger than men’s preference for daughters but that is not nearly as gender differentiated as men’s preference for sons over daughters.

DO PARENTS TREAT SONS AND DAUGHTERS DIFFERENTLY?

Whether or not parents have a preference for one gender or the other, they may still believe that sons and daughters should be reared differently. And even when parents believe that children should be treated the same, regardless of gender, they may not actually rear children in androgynous ways. In fact, they may not even be aware of differential treatment. Not surprisingly, then, there is a large literature in developmental psychology focused on whether mothers, and to a lesser extent fathers, interact similarly with their sons and daughters. We thus begin with a review of the evidence on whether parents interact differently with sons and daughters as they rear their children into adulthood.

As noted by Lundberg (2006), an array of factors might predispose parents to rear boys differently from girls. Same-gender parents and children may more easily develop a homogamy of interests. If fathers want sons more than daughters, having

sons may be viewed by mothers as a way to solidify the conjugal bond. Parents may assume that boys need fathers as role models more than girls do, and this may affect the amount of father-son versus father-daughter interaction. Given past gender differences in adult economic achievements, parents may assume that one gender, most often sons, will have (or need to have) higher economic achievement in adulthood, and this may foster certain types of investment (e.g., saving for college). Parents' expectations about later life exchanges with children (e.g., expectations of financial help from sons but caregiving help from daughters) might also lead them to encourage different behaviors in sons and daughters.

Finally, psychologists, more often than sociologists, argue that sex-based biological differences in children may elicit differential parental response to sons and daughters. For example, sons may elicit less verbal interaction than daughters (Leaper et al. 1998, Leaper & Smith 2004) due in part to biologically based maturational differences. Parents' gender-differentiated responses may then reinforce and accentuate those gender differences. The adult-child interactional context for verbal interaction—and differentiation by gender of child—may be set very early in life and cumulate across childhood (Jones & Moss 1971, Leaper et al. 1998, Moss 1967). Parents' gender-differentiated responses may then reinforce and accentuate these early, partially biologically based gender differences.

The subtle ways in which parents treat their children differently by gender may be hard to detect. One study attempted to pick up on the subtleties by observing parents' storytelling behaviors with their four-year-old sons and daughters. When parents were instructed to tell a story about their childhood, they were more likely to emphasize themes of autonomy when they had sons than when they had daughters (Fiese & Skillman 2000).

Early literature on gender differences in childhood (beginning with the landmark work of Maccoby & Jacklin 1974) focused on very young children, mother-child dyads, and to a far lesser extent father-child dyads. In a much cited meta-analysis by Lytton & Romney (1991), the most striking finding was how few gender-differentiated behaviors were found on the part of parents. In 172 studies assessing parental behaviors that included the amount of interaction (either verbal or stimulation of motor behavior, joint play), encouragement of dependency (or restrictions on independence), disciplinary strictness, encouragement of scholastic achievement, use of verbal reasoning, and encouragement of sex-typed activities, the one area in which parents treated girls differently than boys was in the encouragement of sex-typed activities (e.g., trains for boys, dishes and house for girls in play activities and gender-differentiated household chores). Although the differential treatment in the other areas of socialization did not achieve statistical significance, differences were generally in the expected direction (e.g., discouragement of aggression for girls, more displays of warmth toward girls).

A later meta-analysis by Leaper et al. (1998), restricted to observational studies of language, found greater evidence for differential treatment of sons and daughters. Mothers tended to be more verbal and use more supportive speech with girls than with boys. That is, they tended to spend more time talking in general and

using language that expressed praise, approval, agreement, acknowledgment, or collaboration with daughters than with sons. Differences in language use were larger for unstructured than for structured activities and in natural settings than in laboratory settings. This led Leaper et al. (1998) to caution that parents might actually engage in far more differential treatment of sons and daughters within families than could easily be observed in controlled experimental manipulations. Also, many more studies assessed mother-child than father-child dyads, with typically less gender-differentiated treatment of children being observed by mothers than by fathers. Finally, much of the research was focused on very young children, despite the expectation that gender-differentiated parenting might emerge more strongly as children aged, particularly in adolescence.

More recently, McHale et al. (1999) have observed within-family sibling dyads (e.g., comparing mixed-gender versus same-gender pairs) to see whether mixed-gender pairs elicit more gender-differentiated behaviors on the part of parents in terms of parental warmth, interactional style, temporal involvement with children, and parental knowledge of children's activities. Results are inconclusive as to whether sex-typing occurs more (less) often in mixed-gender pairs. For example, sex-typing of children's personality qualities occurred more often in same-sex dyads, but only in families in which the fathers had traditional gender-role attitudes. Further, sibling sex composition was not associated with sex-typing of leisure interests.

One final caveat about the strength of the evidence on gender differences in the child developmental literature is that findings are most often based on cross-sectional, observational studies. Thus, causality cannot be readily inferred. It remains unclear whether parents treat children differently to produce gender-differentiated outcomes or whether children's gender-differentiated behavior elicits different responses from parents.

SONS, DAUGHTERS, AND HOUSEWORK: DO PARENTS USE GENDERED STEREOTYPES WHEN ALLOCATING HOUSEHOLD LABOR TO CHILDREN?

One area in which parents seem to differentiate by gender is in their encouragement of sex-typed housework activities. Crouter et al. (1993) argue that children's participation in housework is "of particular interest because housework is perhaps the domain of family functioning in which ideas about gender roles are played out, debated, or suppressed the most clearly" (p. 169). Overall, parents in married couple families report that they assign chores for adolescent sons and daughters equally (Tucker et al. 2003). Yet, time diary studies examining the chores that children actually do, not just what they are assigned, suggest that girls do more household work overall (Bianchi & Robinson 1997, Gager & Sanchez 2004). Gender differences in housework persist even when parents are highly educated and subscribe to egalitarian gender ideologies (Gager & Sanchez 2004).

Not only do girls tend to do more housework, the kind of housework they do has gendered components. Girls do more feminine chores (e.g., cooking and cleaning) than boys (Gager et al. 1999, McHale et al. 1990, Raley 2006) and boys do more masculine chores (e.g., household repairs, outdoor work) than girls (McHale et al. 1990, Raley 2006). Even among adult children residing with their parents, daughters do more housework than sons, although gender differences are modest overall (Ward & Spitze 1996). Parents may start out with gender egalitarian intentions by assigning equal household workloads to their sons and daughters but fall short of this goal by ultimately sex-typing the types of chores that are done by sons and daughters.

Further, parents tend to vary their assignment of sex-typed chores depending on how many sons and daughters they have available to do them. When Brody & Steelman (1985) explored married parents' sex-typing of their children's chores, they found that more daughters are associated with more sex-typing of traditionally female chores (e.g., washing dishes, cooking, vacuuming). In other words, when more daughters are available to do traditionally female tasks, parents prefer that their daughters be assigned those tasks. The consistency of findings regarding child gender and housework underscores the gender-role socialization component of what children do in the home and is suggestive of early socialization into gender-specialized household tasks and caregiving that characterize adulthood, especially after individuals marry (South & Spitze 1994) and become parents (Sanchez & Thomson 1997).

ARE PARENTAL ROLES AND EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS MORE CONVENTIONAL OR MORE GENDER SPECIALIZED IN FAMILIES WITH SONS?

A number of provocative studies over the past decade suggest that families with sons may have more gender specialization on the part of parents than families with girls. First, parents of sons are slightly more likely than parents of daughters to express conservative viewpoints toward men's and women's gender roles (Downey et al. 1994, Kane 1997, Warner 1991). The more sons a mother has, the more likely she is to agree that "children always suffer when both parents work outside of the home" and the more likely she is to emphasize obedience in the household (Downey et al. 1994).

These attitudinal differences between families with sons and families with daughters are reflected in behavioral differences as well. Fathers with sons may have a slight tendency to focus more on the conventional paternal breadwinning role than those with daughters, and mothers may be focused on fulfilling the conventional maternal caregiving role when they have sons rather than daughters. Lundberg & Rose (2002), analyzing two cohorts of men in the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), found that fathers work more hours for pay and earn a premium when they have sons. Subsequent analyses of the National Longitudinal

Study of Youth (NLSY) data revealed that variations in parents' work efforts by gender of child were moderated by parents' educational attainment (Lundberg 2005). The greater work effort of fathers with sons is apparent only among the less educated, who tend to hold more conventional gender ideologies in general. Highly educated fathers actually work less (i.e., appear to spend more time at home with their child) when they have a son than when they have a daughter.

A final suggestive finding that families with sons may be more conventional than families with daughters concerns how parents select child care arrangements. Hiedemann et al. (2004) found that non-Hispanic white mothers were more likely to put daughters than sons in regular, nonrelative care when the child was between three and six years old. One explanation of this gender-of-child difference is that mothers with sons are more conventional in their selection of child care arrangements for sons, opting for relative care over day care centers. Downey et al. (1994, p. 37) argue, "If sons are valued more than daughters, parents with more sons than daughters may consider it more crucial to provide personal care for their children rather than risk nonparental child care, especially given the increased negative publicity concerning the quality of day care."

Another explanation, however, is that sons differ behaviorally from daughters, on average; sons may be more physically aggressive and less verbally accomplished, and parents, responding to these behavioral differences, may fear that sons more than daughters are at risk of abusive behavior from nonparental caregivers. Hiedemann et al. (2004) note that the differential selection of child care by child gender "may reflect appropriate responses to children's developmental needs" and "may contribute to gender differences in well-being" (p. 154). Indeed, Baydar & Brooks-Gunn (1991) found that sons of employed mothers were more sensitive to the type of child care than were daughters. In fact, one of the more intriguing and consistent findings in social science literature on maternal employment is that if there is any harm associated with a mother working outside the home in a child's formative years, it is more likely to happen when that child is male (Bogenschneider & Steinberg 1994, Bronfenbrenner & Crouter 1982, Crouter et al. 1993, Desai et al. 1989). In sum, whether mothers with sons are less likely to place their children in nonrelative day care because they hold more conventional viewpoints about child care or whether they do so because of gender-based behavioral differences of the children remains an open question.

DO PARENTS SPEND MORE TIME WITH SAME-SEX THAN OPPOSITE-SEX CHILDREN?

Parents may sex-type their time investments in children because they believe fathers have a special knowledge to impart to sons (e.g., how to be a man), whereas mothers need to spend more time with daughters to properly model

motherhood and nurturing behavior to their daughters. There may also be greater similarity of interests—or greater fostering of similar interests—within than between the genders. In addition, children may contribute to this process by seeking out the parent they feel is most gender appropriate for the activity they want to do. Boys may be more likely to approach their father than their mother when they want something they see as masculine (e.g., to play baseball or visit the barber), and girls may be more likely to approach their mother to fill their needs (e.g., go shopping for clothes) when the activity dovetails with their perception of their mother's rather than their father's greater expertise and interests.

Both adolescent girls and boys identify more closely with their same-sex parent than with their opposite-sex parent (Starrels 1994), and there is limited support in the literature for the idea that same-sex parents and children spend more time together. Tucker et al.'s (2003) examination of two-parent families with two adolescent siblings indicated that mothers spent more time with daughters than with sons and that fathers spent more time with sons than with daughters. In addition, Belsky (1979) found that mothers and fathers focused their baby's attention on an object or event more often with their same-sex infants than with their opposite-sex infants and were more likely to kiss/hug their same-sex children. However, no gender-of-child differences emerged for most other parental behaviors, such as speaking to, teaching, playing, and physical caretaking of children (Belsky 1979). And, in low-income urban families, child gender was unrelated to three categories of parenting styles—harsh, firm, or permissive—among mothers and fathers (Shumow et al. 1998).

Apart from a handful of studies, most research on parents' time with children indicates that mothers do not spend significantly more time with daughters than with sons (Brody & Steelman 1985, Crouter et al. 1993, Siegal 1987). Given that mothers spend much more time in childrearing than fathers and are usually the primary caregivers for children, they may be less likely to vary their time investments by their children's gender when they are providing the basic care for them. In other words, mothers are typically responsible for meeting the day-to-day needs of their children, such as ensuring that children are properly dressed, bathed, and fed, activities that do not generally vary by gender.

Fathers, on the other hand, more often concentrate on breadwinning as their primary parenting role (Townsend 2002) and spend time with children more intermittently and under less need-based circumstances than mothers, although this may be changing (Sayer et al. 2004). Fathers may spend more time with sons because they find it easier to find common ground and share in masculine activities. Harris & Morgan (1991) argue that fathers and mothers alike may feel fathers play a special role in the emotional and social development of their sons, but Morgan & Pollard (2002) also argue that this may be less true today than in the past.

ARE FATHERS MORE INVESTED IN SONS THAN IN DAUGHTERS?

Married Fathers

Although some studies find that fathers spend more time with boys than girls overall (Lamb 1987, Tucker et al. 2003), other studies suggest that the relationship between father involvement and gender of child varies by the gender composition of the sibship, the age of the children, and the type of child care activity. Married fathers spend more time in shared leisure activities in families with sons compared to families with daughters (Bryant & Zick 1996, Katzev et al. 1994), and children of both genders receive greater attention from their father when there is a son present in the family (Harris et al. 1998, Harris & Morgan 1991, Lamb 1987). Sons who are the only boys in the family are particularly advantaged (Harris & Morgan 1991). When fathers have all boys, they spend more time in solo interaction with their children and do a higher proportion of child care tasks than when a girl is present in the sibship (Barnett & Baruch 1987). Although mothers report being just as close to their sons as to their daughters, fathers report being closer to sons (Starrels 1994). Yet, Tucker et al.'s (2003) study of married parents' reports of affection for their sons and daughters indicates that both mothers and fathers feel just as much affection for adolescent daughters as for sons. Therefore, although some fathers may feel closer to sons, they do not necessarily have more affection for their sons than for their daughters.

Some studies found few differences in father involvement by gender of child when the children are under age five but greater father involvement with sons relative to daughters when children are over the age of five (Aldous et al. 1998, Marsiglio 1991). School-aged boys (aged 9 to 11) reported more time spent in one-on-one activities with their father than did girls in two-parent families, but only when the father was the sole breadwinner (Crouter & Crowley 1990). On weekdays, boys in two-parent families spent more time than girls in play and companionship activities with their fathers (Yeung et al. 2001). When differences in paternal time with children emerge in the literature, they are generally small and highly contingent on the characteristics of the father, child, and activity.

Whereas most previous studies on father involvement and gender of child suggest fathers spend more time with sons than with daughters, some recent literature suggests that fathers are becoming more egalitarian in their time investments in their children. Morgan & Pollard (2002) suggest coercive pressures for traditional gender behavior are eroding, and both parents and children face increased social pressure to adopt more egalitarian roles (p. 13). Women have entered high-status occupations traditionally held by men, the wage gap has narrowed, and men are assuming a greater proportion of the household labor (Bianchi et al. 2000, Bianchi & Spain 1996). Additionally, because girls now engage in activities similar to those of boys, it may be easier than in the past for a father to interact with daughters. Daughters may be more inclined to engage in traditionally masculine activities,

especially in light of Title IX, a law banning sex discrimination in federally funded public schools that has led to greater participation of girls in sports. In fact, by 1997 there was no statistically significant difference in the time boys and girls aged 3 to 12 spent in sports activities (Hofferth & Sandberg 2001).

Unmarried Fathers

Although married fathers' involvement in childrearing has increased (Sayer et al. 2004) and their treatment of sons and daughters may have become more egalitarian over time, far less is known about unmarried fathers and stepfathers. The Fragile Families Study, launched in 1998, is one of the first and only studies to comprehensively examine unmarried fathers' involvement with their newborn children. Lundberg et al.'s (2005) preliminary analysis of these data is suggestive of greater father investment in sons than in daughters. Among families experiencing a non-marital birth, a father's connection to a newborn son is more likely to be formally acknowledged—sons more often than daughters are given their father's last name and have their father's name listed on the birth certificate. Although unmarried fathers are equally likely to visit the hospital after their female or their male child is born, one year later fathers generally tend to be more actively involved with sons than daughters. Fathers who remain in contact with their children feed, change the diapers of, play with, and visit relatives with their sons more often than with their daughters. One activity, singing, may be done slightly more often with daughters than sons, but most evidence in the Fragile Families data suggests that fathers who are not married to the mother at the time of the birth are more committed and involved with their children when they have a son.

Additionally, new partners of unmarried mothers—stepfathers—appear to differentiate treatment of their stepchildren by gender to a greater extent than biological fathers, although the sample size for this group is small. These new cohabitating partners spend more time in almost every child care activity when their partners have sons rather than daughters (Lundberg et al. 2005). Whether all stepfathers discriminate more than biological fathers by the gender of the stepchild is unclear, however. Hofferth & Anderson's (2003) comparison of father involvement among married biological fathers and married stepfathers showed that, on average, fathers spend less time engaged with girls than with boys, but differences do not appear to be larger for stepfathers than for biological fathers.

MARITAL STABILITY AND MARITAL HAPPINESS

Several recent studies claim that one way that fathers invest more heavily in sons than in daughters is through their marriage behavior. Unmarried fathers may be more likely to marry the mother of their child when the child is a son rather than a daughter. Using California birth certificate data, Dahl & Moretti (2004) found that

mothers who have an ultrasound test during the pregnancy (and thus may discover whether the baby is a boy or a girl) are more likely to be married at the birth of the child when they have a son than mothers who give birth to a daughter. There is no difference in the probability of marriage by gender of the birth for those who do not have an ultrasound during the pregnancy. This gender-of-child association with marriage persists for mothers whose child is born outside marriage—women unmarried at the time of the birth are more likely to marry the father after a son's than a daughter's birth (the effect does not hold true for a partner who is not the biological father, only for the likelihood of marriage to the biological father). Additionally, when these mothers marry the fathers of their children, they tend to do so more quickly when they have a son than when they have a daughter (Lundberg & Rose 2003).

The literature showing an association between gender of children and parents' marriages extends to parents' reports of happiness within marriages. When married couples transition to parenthood, they are more likely to report being satisfied with their marriages and to report positive marital interactions following the birth of a son compared with the birth of a daughter, although these gender-of-child differences are small (White & Brinkerhoff 1981). Additionally, having all boys is associated with higher levels of happiness than having an equal number of sons and daughters or having more daughters than sons (Dahl & Moretti 2004, Mizell & Steelman 2000).

If the presence of (all) sons invites active involvement from fathers, this may make mothers happier. Indeed, Katzev et al. (1994) found mothers perceived less disadvantage in their marital relationships when they had sons, and this was associated with fathers' engagement with children. However, Mizell & Steelman (2000) did not find that paternal involvement mediated the association between sons and marital happiness. Instead, they suggest that mothers may enjoy the attention or status as the lone female in a family of boys.

Gender of Child and Divorce

Not only may mothers with all or mostly sons be happier in their marriages, they may also be more likely to stay married. Studies consistently show that, at least in the 1970s and 1980s, families with sons were less likely to divorce than were families with daughters (Katzev et al. 1994, Mammen 2003, Morgan et al. 1988, Morgan & Pollard 2002, Mott 1994, Spanier & Glick 1981). Researchers explain this finding by pointing to the value placed on the socialization processes associated with the father-son relationship and the greater involvement of fathers with sons than with daughters (Katzev et al. 1994, Morgan et al. 1988, Morgan & Pollard 2002). Two recent studies, using data from the 1990s, found no evidence that marriages of recent cohorts of parents are strengthened by the presence of sons (Morgan & Pollard 2002), and a third study found that the association between having daughters and divorce is still significant but weakening (Dahl & Moretti 2004). The weakening of the association between gender of children and divorce

may mean that the expectation that fathers be more involved in parenting their sons than their daughters is no longer as pervasive as in recent decades.

Gender of child is also associated with the probability of second divorces. Among women who have already gone through one divorce and subsequently remarried, those who only have daughters are more likely to experience a second divorce (Dahl & Moretti 2004). The probability of remarriage, however, is not associated with gender of child (Dahl & Moretti 2004).

Child Custody and Child Support

What happens to families in the aftermath of divorce, and does this vary for sons and daughters? Here, again, some studies report associations between gender of child, custody awards, and child support. In terms of both legal and physical custody, shared custody is more probable in all-boy families, and father sole custody is more likely when the children are older boys (Cancian & Meyer 1998). The literature offers little insight into what drives these arrangements, which could be motivated by a variety of sources, including parent, child, or court preferences (Cancian & Meyer 1998).

The associations between gender of child, payment of child support, and contact with children are complex and somewhat contradictory. Among divorced mothers with older (12+ years) children, those with daughters are less likely to receive child support than those with sons (Dahl & Moretti 2004). However, when the universe is all single mothers (including divorced, separated, and never-married mothers with children of any age), studies indicate no gender difference or perhaps even slight advantages for girls (Mammen 2003, Paasch & Teachman 1991). If anything, fathers may be slightly more likely to pay child support and visit when their child is a girl rather than a boy (Mammen 2003, Paasch & Teachman 1991, Seltzer 1991). For example, Paasch & Teachman (1991) found that although most forms of assistance that nonresident fathers give to their children do not vary by the gender of their children, fathers with all daughters are more likely to carry the child on their medical insurance and pay for routine dental care. In addition, Cooksey & Craig (1998) found girls are more likely than boys to talk on the phone with their nonresident fathers, although they found no association between child's gender and face-to-face visitation. They speculate that these findings could be just as much a function of the child as the father. Because women tend to be the organizers of kin networks (DiLeonardo 1987, Rosenthal 1985), girls more than boys may initiate and maintain kin contacts, including contact with an absent father. Girls may be more likely than boys to phone their father and perhaps more likely to prompt and arrange visits. If daughters are more likely than sons to maintain contact with a nonresident father, this might in turn encourage fathers of daughters more often than fathers of sons to make their child support payments, visit, or carry their children on their medical policies.

Taken as a whole, the literature indicates that fathers are somewhat more invested in parenting when they have sons than when they have daughters. None

of the individual findings is persuasive, but the cumulative evidence suggests that boys spend more time with fathers than do girls, speed their parents' entry into marriage, more often reside in married-couple families, are more likely to be given their father's name when their parents are not married, more often reside with married parents who claim to be happy, and less often experience their parents' marital breakup (although this gender difference is waning). When parents divorce, boys are more likely to live with their father after the divorce, although they are not more likely than girls to call, visit, or be financially supported by their father when they do not live with him.

One caveat on this summary is that findings are dominated by the experience of white families. Mott (1994) found that white fathers are more likely to be present in the home if they have (biological) sons, but there is no association between father presence and gender of child among black fathers. This may be a result of different parenting norms between black and white fathers. Characteristics of the child, including gender but also biological relatedness, may be more salient for some racial groups than for others.

DO PARENTS MAKE DIFFERENT INVESTMENTS IN THE EDUCATION OF SONS AND DAUGHTERS?

In addition to parental time investments, parents make financial/educational investments that are important to their children's development. Becker (1981) argues that parents interested in allocating their resources efficiently would invest more in the human capital of their brightest children. Although parents may not see their sons as brighter than their daughters, parents may perceive the opportunities in the social, economic, and political structure to be different for sons and daughters. For example, it continues to be the case that women earn lower wages than men, take more time out of the labor force during adulthood to rear children, and have a lower status in the occupational structure, even though recent cohorts of women have higher rates of educational attainment than men (Blau et al. 1998). As parents prepare their children for adulthood and determine how to invest resources in their sons and daughters, they may keep these larger gender differences in mind. Carter & Wojtkiewicz (2000) argue that parents may actually invest more in the education of their daughters, anticipating that women need higher educational attainment to earn as much as men with less education. The more traditional human capital argument, however, is that parents have an incentive to invest in the child with the higher likelihood of future success—in this case, sons.

Research on gender of child and parents' educational investment suggests that parents tend to assist their daughters and sons in their educational development differently. On the one hand, parents have higher educational expectations for their daughters and discuss educational matters with daughters more frequently than with sons (even after controlling for grades, test scores, and aspirations, which likely differ by gender) (Carter & Wojtkiewicz 2000, Freese & Powell 1999).

Parents also provide greater educational supervision, invest more in social and cultural capital, enrolling their daughters in more cultural classes (e.g., art, music, dance, and computer classes taken outside of school) than sons (Freese & Powell 1999).

On the other hand, parents are more likely to believe that science is more difficult and less interesting for their adolescent daughters than sons, even when there are no gender differences in sons' and daughters' science-related interests and grades (Tenenbaum & Leaper 2003). Mothers are also more likely to underestimate their daughters' but overestimate their sons' ability in mathematics (Frome & Eccles 1998). In addition, parents are more involved with school (i.e., attend school meetings, arrange conferences with teachers and counselors) on behalf of their sons, even when academic/behavioral factors are taken into account. Perhaps most importantly, parents with boys are more likely to have begun saving for college education and have saved more money for their sons overall (Freese & Powell 1999).

Parents' greater financial backing of sons' college education is underscored by the finding in some studies that the number of brothers decreases the likelihood of a child receiving financial support for higher education from parents (Conley 2000, Powell & Steelman 1989). The greater competition for parents' financial resources among families with more boys suggests parents are trying to send as many of their boys to college as possible. Parents may be less financially supportive of their daughter's higher educational aspirations by saving less for them. Or parents may recognize that daughters (at least among the cohorts previously studied) may have lower educational aspirations and elect noneducational alternatives (Powell & Steelman 1990).

Even if parents tend to lend more financial support to sons than to daughters, it may not translate into greater achievement for sons. Conley (2000) found no connection between receipt of financial assistance and actual educational outcomes. And, although Powell & Steelman (1990) found that having brothers is associated with lower grade point averages among high school seniors, Butcher & Case (1994) claim having sisters impedes the educational attainment and earnings of women. Weighing in on the debate, Hauser & Kuo (1998) analyzed cohorts of women in three data sets (i.e., the Occupation Changes in a Generation Survey, the Survey of Income and Program Participation, and the National Survey of Families and Households) and found no evidence that gender sibship composition affects women's educational attainment.

Conley (2000) argues that the effects of sibling configuration are complex: It is not a matter of brothers or sisters per se but the presence of opposite-sex siblings that results in reduced academic outcomes. Children who are the sex minority may have difficulty getting sex-specific needs met in the home. Conley (2000) found that men tend to have lower educational outcomes when they have sisters, whereas women's educational attainment is hurt by having brothers. Therefore, taken as a whole, the literature does not yield a clear consensus on the relationship between the gender composition of the sibship and educational outcomes.

HOW DOES ADULT CHILDREN'S CAREGIVING FOR PARENTS VARY BY GENDER?

A number of studies examine differences in parent-child ties and exchanges between adult sons and daughters and elderly parents. Like the caregiving of children, the caregiving of parents has a gendered pattern: Daughters are more likely than sons to provide care to their elderly parents (Ingersoll-Dayton et al. 1996, Miller & Carasso 1992, Spitze & Logan 1990, Stoller 1983).

Central to daughters' caregiving role for elderly parents is providing social support and home maintenance (Ingersoll-Dayton et al. 1996, Sherman et al. 1988). In particular, having at least one daughter increases the chances that an aging parent will have telephone communication and visits from his/her children (Lee et al. 2003, Spitze & Logan 1990). Even when families have only one son or all sons, there seems to be no substitute for daughters—children do not seem to be more likely to take on a caregiving role even in the absence of any available daughter to do so (Spitze & Logan 1990). However, the gender composition of adult siblings seems to be unrelated to the probability that an aging parent will reside with a child (Spitze & Logan 1990), although this relationship is dependent on the child's marital status, with unmarried sons the group most likely to live with their elderly mothers (Wolf & Soldo 1988).

When comparing the gendered pattern of caregiving between in-laws and biological parents, Lee et al. (2003) found that daughters tend to give more care to their biological parents than to their parents-in-law, whereas sons are not necessarily more helpful to their biological parents. However, because sons give less help to aging parents overall, low levels of assistance may make it more difficult to observe differences in their helping behavior toward parents and parents-in-law.

Sons-in-law and daughters-in-law generally lend similar amounts of caregiving to their parents-in-law (Ingersoll-Dayton et al. 1996, Sarkisian & Gerstel 2004). Hence, the pattern of caregiving for biological parents is much more gendered than that of parents-in-law. This suggests that daughters-in-law do not easily substitute for biological daughters when it comes to providing care to parents in their twilight years.

CONCLUSION

The growing literature on the associations between gender of children and various family processes such as childbearing, childrearing, marriage, divorce, and intergenerational exchange reflects social scientists' increasing interest in gender and the gender composition of sibships in the context of family dynamics. Many of the findings, particularly those relating gender of children to parents' marital and employment outcomes, are surprising and challenge previously held

assumptions about the importance (or nonimportance) of children's gender in the United States.

As a whole, the literature suggests that gender of children has implications for the ways in which parents treat, spend time with, invest in, and ultimately receive care from their children later in life. Although some of the evidence is inconclusive, boys, on average, do less housework than girls, have more engaged and perhaps committed fathers, have higher paternal earnings, and have parents with greater marital happiness. In short, boys are more likely than girls to reap the financial and emotional benefits associated with two-parent families (Lundberg et al. 2005).

Yet, the United States is far from having the kind of son preference observed in developing countries, and this conclusion deserves a number of caveats. First, even though boys may be somewhat advantaged when the array of family behaviors is considered, egalitarian gender norms have become more widespread. Some trends, like fathers' greater investment in rearing sons than daughters and stronger marital ties in families with sons, appear to be waning over time. Second, even in areas like children's housework, where the findings are strong and consistent that girls do more than boys, the differences are still not very large.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, there may be a bias in the social science literature toward the publication of articles that find statistically significant gender differences. Null findings are typically thought to be harder to publish, so the ways in which girls and boys are treated similarly may be less publicized. Thus, our review covers an array of family dynamics that are moderately associated with gender of child, but the myriad family processes that are not associated with gender of child are not part of this review.

Finally, the innovative ways in which gender of child has been analyzed in family research have advanced our conceptualizations of gender, children, and family. At the same time, some of the more provocative relationships have only been analyzed with cross-sectional data. Therefore, the social science literature is full of a number of suggestive associations, but the pathways through which gender of child affects various family outcomes are not yet well understood. Findings using panel studies are often so recent that they have yet to be replicated. When associations are small, as they tend to be in most of these gender-of-child studies, the replication of findings is particularly valuable for advancing the state of knowledge in this field. Most often when associations are discovered, they are quickly interpreted as suggestive of parental preferences for one gender over another or parental differential treatment of sons and daughters. Often insufficient attention is paid, both in study designs and in the interpretation of findings, to the ways that sons' and daughters' behaviors may differ, on average, and may thus motivate differential treatment by parents. Yet children are active constructors of their universe. Greater attention to the ways in which sons and daughters elicit or reinforce differential parental investments is a topic worthy of more serious sociological attention than it has been given to date.

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