



Why do women interact with their parents more often than men? The demonstration effect vs. the biological effect



Hung-Lin Tao*

Department of Economics, Soochow University, Taipei, Taiwan

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 January 2013

Received in revised form 9 April 2014

Accepted 9 April 2014

Available online 6 May 2014

Keywords:

The demonstration effect

Empathizing

Systemizing

Children as old-age security

ABSTRACT

Neuroscientists have shown that females are biologically more caring than males. In this paper, two empirical strategies are applied to examine the validity of using gender difference as the evidence for the argument. The first approach is to compare visits to parents between single females and single males. The second approach is to investigate whether females evaluate children as old-age security to render them more important in their lives. The conclusions of these two approaches do not support the position.

© 2014 Western Social Science Association. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Altruistic and exchange motives are the main competing models used to explain *inter vivos*, intergenerational transfers. These two theoretical models and their empirical tests produce mixed results (Laferrère & Wolff, 2006) and seem too simple to fully characterize the sophisticated behavior of the intergenerational transfers. Recently, an alternative motive, the demonstration effect, has been proposed. The demonstration effect postulates that, by taking care of their elderly parents, adult parents set a norm to manipulate their children to behave in the same way toward themselves when they age. The demonstration effect is also referred to as preference shaping.

Cox and Stark (1994) are probably the first to propose the demonstration effect and indicate that the presence of grandchildren increases contacts between elderly parents

and adult parents. However, using French data, Wolff (2001) shows that the increased contact is due to the care provided by elderly parents for the grandchildren. Cox and Stark (2005) argue that elderly parents benefit if they have grandchildren since their adult children are more willing to provide services and time to them. They show that adult children who intend to have a child are more likely to be financially supported by their elderly parents with housing payments. Cox and Stark (2005) stress that the financial help received from elderly parents is intended to encourage the production of grandchildren.

However, it is possible that adult children who have a good relationship with their elderly parents are more likely to be financially supported by their elderly parents. A good relationship between the generations encourages the adult children to have a child. This finding cannot underpin the demonstration effect. The other piece of evidence that they provide in regard to the demonstration effect is that elderly parents are more likely to help their sons than their daughters with their housing purchases. They explain that housing is complementary to a satisfactory marriage and hence to the production of grandchildren. In the case

* Correspondence address: 56, Kuei-Yang Street, Sec. 1, Taipei 100, Taiwan. Tel.: +886 2 23111531x3669; fax: +886 2 23822001.

E-mail address: hltao@scu.edu.tw

of marital breakups, mothers will usually retain their children. Elderly parents, whose children are adult fathers, cannot be beneficiaries of the demonstration effect in the case where their adult sons' marriages break up. Elderly parents are therefore more motivated to help their sons than their daughters. Alternatively, it is almost a universal convention that males are the breadwinners in their families, and are hence responsible for housing. Again, this is not evidence of the demonstration effect.

Instead of circumventing the use of contacts between two generations, [Mitrut and Wolff \(2009\)](#) argue that females have longer life expectancy and thus are more motivated to manipulate the demonstration effect. Since manipulation of the preference shaping is effective when the next generation is young, and since females are more likely to take care of their elderly parents, they show that adult females who have a younger daughter are more likely to make contact with their elderly parents. Using Bulgarian data, [Mitrut and Wolff \(2009\)](#) claim that this is the first causal evidence of the demonstration effect, implying that none of the prior research provided causal evidence.

Whether or not differences in gender-specific intergenerational transfers can validate the demonstration effect is an open question. Without proposing the demonstration effect, abundant social science studies, for example, [Lopata \(1973\)](#), [Spitze and Logan \(1990\)](#), [Silverstein, Parrott, and Bengtson \(1995\)](#), and [Silverstein, Gans, and Yang \(2006\)](#) find that daughters, rather than sons, bear most of the responsibility to take care of their elderly parents, except in some patriarchal societies, such as India, China, and Taiwan ([Lee, Parish, & Willis, 1994](#); [Lin & Yi, 2011](#); [Lin et al., 2003](#); [Ofstedal, Knodel, & Chayovan, 1999](#)). In the patriarchal family system, taking care of elderly parents is the sons' responsibility. The married females' responsibility is to take care of their parents-in-law, and not their own parents. As a result, the demonstration effect varies with culture. To people in Confucian culture, the demonstration effect involves practicing filial piety and instilling filial piety in the next generation. In Confucian societies, such as China, Taiwan, and many East Asian countries, married females who have younger sons are more motivated to manipulate the demonstration effect since in a patrilineal society sons play the central role in taking care of their elderly parents. Married females are not encouraged to transfer many resources to their own parents. Theoretically, married people who have sons are more likely to visit their parents if they do not live with their elderly parents.

More importantly, females are more likely than males to express concern and responsibility for others' well-being, and less likely than males to pursue materialism ([Beutel & Marini, 1995](#)). It is then not surprising that the motives behind sons' and daughters' intergenerational support of their aging parents differ substantially ([Silverstein et al., 1995, 2006](#); [Yi & Lin, 2009](#)). Adult daughters are motivated by intergenerational affection, whereas adult sons are motivated by filial obligation and the legitimation of inheritance. In other words, adult daughters like to make contact with their elderly parents, while adult sons think they should make contact with their elderly parents. The motivational and behavioral differences between genders

can be attributed to socialization and the biological gene. Some studies, such as [Silverstein et al. \(1995\)](#), [Beutel and Marini \(1995\)](#), and [Silverstein et al. \(2006\)](#), believe that gender-specific differences in intergenerational support are a consequence of socialization, for example, a consequence of the gendered division of labor in families. Of course, socialization is a consequence of the complex interplay of nature and nurture. It is very difficult to disentangle these two factors in terms of how they work in upward intergenerational support. While this study does not intend to argue that the biological factor is more important than the process of socialization, it intends to provide some biological evidence demonstrating that females are by nature more empathic and caring than males. If females are born to be more empathic and caring, then adult females are naturally more willing to take care of their aging parents.

This study uses Taiwanese data to investigate the demonstration effect. First, adults without children do not have a motive to manipulate the demonstration effect. If single females interact with their elderly parents more often than single males, then adult mothers with children interacting with their elderly parents more often than adult fathers, as found in the literature, cannot be explained by the demonstration effect. Second, a precondition to argue that females are more motivated to put the demonstration effect into practice is that females are more likely than males to regard children as their old age security. This study will investigate these two issues to examine whether the demonstration effect can interpret Taiwan's data.

2. Gender biological differences

2.1. Gender differences in empathy

Neuroscientists find that males and females have very different brain systems beginning with their embryonic period. The crux of their findings is that the source of gender difference, in addition to socialization, is nature. Neuroscientists suggest that testosterone plays a key role in differentiating the development of the brain system between embryonic females and males. Testosterone stimulates the development of the right hemisphere, and the right hemisphere manages systemizing ([Baron-Cohen, 2003](#); [Geschwind & Galaburda, 1985, 1987](#); [Lutchmaya, Baron-Cohen, Raggatt, 2002a, 2002b](#); [Moir & Jessel, 1992](#)), the drive to analyze, explore, and construct a system. Individuals with great systemizing ability intuitively figure out the underlying rules that govern the behavior of a system. [Baron-Cohen \(2003\)](#) and [Baron-Cohen, Knickmeyer, and Belmonte \(2005\)](#) call it the male brain, and punctiliously indicate that it might occur in females (with female genitals) if they have high levels of testosterone. The development of systemizing suppresses the development of empathy, which is the drive to identify people's emotions and thoughts, and to respond accordingly. [Baron-Cohen \(2003\)](#) and [Baron-Cohen et al. \(2005\)](#) call it the female brain. Again, males (with male genitals) might have the female brain if their testosterone level is low. Empathy enables someone to care for and offer comfort to other

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/139987>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/139987>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)