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# Adult Children's Perceptions of Maternal Favoritism During Caregiving: Comparisons Between Turkey and the United States

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## Abstract

This study explores cross-cultural variations in adult children's perceptions of maternal favoritism during caregiving in Turkey and the United States. Qualitative analysis of interview data from two siblings in each of 14 Turkish and 14 American families revealed differences in adult children's perceptions of and explanations for maternal favoritism. Most Turkish children perceived that their mothers favored sons because of higher filial expectations from sons. Conversely, most American children perceived that their mothers favored daughters and explained mothers' preferences as based on socio-emotional factors. Furthermore, perceptions of maternal favoritism had detrimental consequences for sibling relationships in both contexts but differently. Turkish daughters reported conflicts over their favored brothers' lack of cooperation. American daughters perceived themselves as favored and felt obligated to undertake most of the caregiving burden which fueled

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sibling conflict. Taken together, this study highlights the importance of cultural context for understanding the within-family differences in sibling relationships during caregiving.

## **Keywords**

caregiving, culture, gender, parental favoritism, sibling relationships

Adult child–parent relationships in later-life families have received substantial attention in the social and behavioral sciences. Recently, studies have begun examining within-family differences in the dynamics of intergenerational relationships in later-life families, including parental differential treatment (PDT; Suito et al., 2017). Although parenting norms discourage favoring some offspring over others, research has shown that most parents treat their offspring differently in adulthood (Jensen, Whiteman, Fingerman, & Birditt, 2013; Jensen, Whiteman, Rand, & Fingerman, 2016; Suito et al., 2009; Suito et al., 2016; Suito & Pillemer, 2006; Suito, Sechrist, Steinhour, & Pillemer, 2006). These studies have shown that when parents differentiate among their offspring, there are substantial negative consequences for adult children. In particular, PDT in later-life families is associated with higher conflict and lower emotional closeness among adult siblings (author citation; Gilligan, Suito, Kim, & Pillemer, 2013; Jensen et al., 2013; Suito et al., 2009), especially during caregiving (Suito, Gilligan, Johnson, & Pillemer, 2014), as well as with higher depressive symptoms among offspring who perceive that they have been favored or disfavored (Peng, Suito, & Gilligan, 2016; Suito et al., 2017). These patterns may be intensified within the context of caregiving as meeting the needs of older parents necessitates constant interactions among siblings to coordinate care, potentially creating or exacerbating sibling conflict (Suito et al., 2014).

Thus far, studies of PDT in adulthood have been conducted almost exclusively in Western countries such as Germany and the United States. Further, the few studies that have explored the patterns and consequences of PDT in non-Western countries (Davidson-Arad & Klein, 2011; de Man, Wong, & Leung, 2003; Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2010; Moharib, 2013) have focused on a single culture, rather than making cross-cultural comparisons, and have overwhelmingly explored patterns and consequences of PDT in adolescence. Cross-cultural studies comparing families in Western and non-Western societies are important as they decenter Western conceptions of families. Turkey and the United States have strikingly different sociocultural contexts in regard to social

policies on family, gender, fertility, and caregiving as well as diverse cultural and religious identities that fundamentally affect family relationships. Therefore, we propose that comparisons of families from these two societies have the potential to make an important contribution to our understanding of cross-cultural variations in parent–child and sibling relationships during caregiving.

In this article, we take a life-course perspective (Conger & Elder, 1994; Elder, 1985, 1994), proposing that the relationship of an adult child with his/her parents is embedded in the larger context of interconnected family ties and influenced by each party's relationships with other family members. Further, the life-course perspective encourages the examination of diverse social cultural contexts, particularly when studying families (Bengtson & Allen, 1993). In response to this call, in the present article, we present a cross-cultural comparison of adult children's perceptions of maternal favoritism during caregiving. To address this research question, we use qualitative data collected during in-depth interviews with 28 adult children nested within 14 Turkish families and 28 adult children nested within 14 American families. Furthermore, we examine the consequences of these perceptions on conflict among siblings during caregiving in Turkish and American contexts.

## **Background**

### *Intergenerational Relationships and Family Caregiving in Turkey*

Compared to the broad literature on American later-life families, there has been scant attention to later-life families and family caregiving in Turkey. Research within this context, however, tends to categorize Turkish culture as collectivistic with strong commitments to family norms and values. A nationally representative survey conducted in 2010 found that a very high percentage (96.8%) of the respondents declared that family is very important to them (Family Values in Turkey Study, 2010). Further, studies suggest that interdependencies between generations continue to persist despite major social transformations such as urbanization and economic development (Ataca, Kağıtçıbaşı, & Diri, 2005; Aycicegi-Dinn & Kağıtçıbaşı, 2010; Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca, 2005). Kağıtçıbaşı and Ataca (2005) have shown that interdependence between generations did not simply fade away in Turkish society with such transformations, but rather Turkish parents have started to value their offspring emotionally instead of attributing instrumental values to their children. Rather than a complete independence, they argue, a more psychological form of intergenerational dependencies has developed in Turkey, signifying a “culture of relatedness” (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996, 2005).

Norms of filial responsibilities have been very prominent in Turkish society. Eighty-five percent of the respondents in the Family Values in Turkey Study (2010) agreed with the statement “older family members in need should be cared for by their children within the family context” and 75% agreed with “when I age, my children should take care of me.” These filial responsibilities and expectations are also gendered; as in other Asian societies (Yi, George, Sereny, Gu, & Vaupel, 2016; Zhang, 2009), there is an understanding of sons as the “old-age insurance” in Turkish society. Even though some studies reported that Turkish parents, especially those in urban settings and with higher socioeconomic backgrounds, were more likely to attribute equal psychological value to their sons and daughters (Ataca et al., 2005; Aycicegi-Dinn & Kağitçibaşı, 2010), the instrumental value of children appears to remain gendered. As shown in a nationally representative survey, significantly more people above the age of 60 reported that they would prefer to stay with sons (28.9%) than with daughters (10.3%) when they need care (Family Structure in Turkey Study, 2011). Older parents’ gendered preference of coresidence with their adult children might be stemming from a traditional expectation of sons to marry, bring their brides into their parents’ household, and take care of their parents until their death (Baştuğ, 2002; Duben, 1985). Contrary to these expectations, it is actually daughters and daughters-in-law who are more likely to provide care for older parents in contemporary Turkish families (Duben, 2013; Mottram & Hortaçsu, 2005). However, no attention has been given to the consequences of this incongruence between Turkish parents’ expectations and patterns of caregiving by adult children on the relational or psychological well-being of either party.

In addition, the few existing studies on family caregiving in Turkey have utilized a between-family approach, focusing on the dyad of care-recipient parent and his or her primary caregiver (Akpınar, Küçükgüçlü, & Yener, 2011; Hacıalioglu, Özer, Erdem, & Erci, 2010; Kiral, Yetim, Özge, & Aydın, 2017; Yılmaz, Turan, & Gundogar, 2009). Yet, providing care to older parents necessitates constant interaction, if not cooperation, among adult children (Connidis & Kemp, 2008; Leinonen, 2011; Tolkaçeva, van Groenou, & van Tilburg, 2010). Therefore, in this study, we move beyond a single dyad and focus on the sibling subsystem of parent care by utilizing a within-family approach. Considering the complexity of parent–adult child and sibling relationships, especially in the caregiving context, a within-family approach enables us to explore variations in parent–adult child relationships and their consequences on sibling conflict (Suitor et al., 2017).

## *Cross-Cultural Comparisons of PDT in Later-Life Families*

Studies exploring within-family differences in parent–adult child relationships in Western countries have identified PDT as one of the most important socioemotional mechanisms affecting the relational (Boll, Ferring, & Flipp, 2003, 2005; Gilligan et al., 2013; Jensen et al., 2013; Siennick, 2013; Suito et al., 2009) and psychological well-being of both parties (Peng et al., 2016; Pillemer, Suito, Riffin, & Gilligan, 2017). Consistent with theories of social comparison (Festinger, 1954; Suls & Wheeler, 2000), research has shown that when adult children perceive that their parents favor some siblings over others, regardless of who is favored, adult children report lower emotional closeness (Jensen et al., 2013; Siennick, 2013) and higher tension with siblings (Boll et al., 2003, 2005; Gilligan et al., 2013; Suito et al., 2009). Most investigations of PDT have studied this process outside of the context of caregiving; however, one study focused specifically on PDT when mothers were in need of assistance following a health event. This study found that the association between adult children’s perceptions of PDT and sibling conflict was intensified when offspring were themselves providing care to their mothers (Suito et al., 2014). This finding suggests that understanding the role of PDT in sibling conflict is especially important in the context of caregiving due to its potential impact on sibling cooperation regarding provision of care to parents in need of assistance.

To our knowledge, no studies have examined whether such patterns and consequences of within-family differences occur in Turkey. However, we propose that principles of social comparison can be applied to sibling relations in Turkey and that studying these processes is essential to understanding successful family caregiving in Turkish society. If parents differentiate among their offspring during caregiving, such PDT may fuel sibling conflict, making it difficult to develop a coordinated plan for optimal caregiving outcomes. The few studies that focused on family caregiving in Turkey have not taken into account patterns of PDT or their consequences on sibling relationships. Therefore, in this work, we shed light on similarities and differences in the ways in which maternal differential treatment influences sibling cooperation when mothers are in need of care in Turkish and American families.

## **Method**

### *Data*

*Turkish study.* The data on Turkish families were collected between February and April in 2013 as part of a study conducted to understand how adult

children divide and negotiate parent care responsibilities among themselves. This study involved semistructured, in-depth interviews with adult sibling dyads from 15 families in which older parents were in need of care. These adult children were recruited from three different neighborhoods of Ankara, the capital of Turkey. These three neighborhoods, Cankaya, Yenimahalle, and Mamak, were selected to ensure variation by socioeconomic status in the sample (Kalaycıoğlu, Çelik, Delen, & Türkyılmaz, 2010). Snowball sampling was utilized to recruit respondents from each neighborhood. The sample for this study consists of individuals above the age of 18 who have at least one parent above the age of 60 in need of care and at least one living sibling. An adult child from each family was first interviewed and, following the interview, they were asked to provide the contact information of one of their siblings. The lead author conducted a pilot study in which two siblings from the same Turkish family were interviewed separately to test clarity and applicability of the questions in the interview protocol. Overall, 30 adult children were interviewed in person and separately about their relationships with parents and siblings during caregiving. These in-depth interviews lasted for 45–90 min. The saturation point in this study was determined based on “meaning saturation” (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017), stopping data collection when the themes started to appear clearly, and no new themes emerged out of additional interviews. The length of interviews also enabled the researcher to collect rich data, which also contributed to the achievement of meaning saturation. Original interviews with the Turkish adult children were conducted in Turkish and translated to English by the first author whose native language is Turkish and who is fully fluent in English and has been trained in the United States. For this article, we omitted 1 of the 15 Turkish families in which a father, rather than a mother, was provided care. Thus, the final Turkish component of the analytic sample for this article was composed of the 28 adult children in 14 families in which the mother needed care.

*U.S. study.* The data on American families were collected as a part of (Within-Family Differences Study). The study began in 2001 with the goal of investigating the prevalence, predictors, and consequences of within-family differences in parent–adult child relationships in later-life (<http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~jsuitor/within-family-differences-study/>) families. Massachusetts city and town lists were the source of the sample of mothers. The design of the study involved drawing a systematic sample of mothers 65–75 years of age with at least two living adult children from the town lists from 20 communities in the greater Boston area and collecting data from mothers regarding each of their children. (A more detailed description of the

design can be found at) In this study, approximately 550 families were invited to participate. The first wave of interviews took place between 2001 and 2003 with 566 women. Following the interview, the mothers were asked for contact information for their adult children. Eighty-one percent of the mothers provided contact information, and as a result, 774 of their adult children were interviewed. The original study was expanded to include a second wave of data collection from 2008 to 2011 at which time a total of 420 of the original mothers and 835 of their offspring were interviewed by telephone. These interviews lasted 45–90 min. Mothers were asked about their relationships with each of their offspring and asked to differentiate among their children on a wide range of relationship dimensions; children were asked about their relationship quality with their mothers and their perceptions of their mothers' differentiation. To draw the final American component of the analytic sample for this article, we began by creating a subsample of non-Hispanic (Within-Family Differences Study). White families from the second wave of the that matched the Turkish families in terms of family size, gender composition, and health and marital status of the mother. We then drew a systematic random sample of 28 adult children from 14 families from this subsample for analyses for the present article.

The Turkish study received ethical approval from the university where the lead author was a graduate student at the time of data collection. This study is also approved by the institutional review board at the U.S. university where all the analyses for this article were conducted.

### *Sample Characteristics*

The average age of mothers in the Turkish sample was 76.8 years, which is very close to the average age of mothers in the U.S. sample (77.5 years). Adult children in both samples were in their midlife; the average age of adult children in the Turkish sample was 48.3 years, whereas the average age of adult children in the U.S. sample was 47.3 years. In both samples, the percentage of daughters in families was 51%, and the average family size was 4.3 children.

Demographic characteristics of adult children and their mothers in both the Turkish and U.S. sample are presented in Table 1.

### *Analytic Approach and Measurement of Perceptions of Maternal Favoritism*

This study uses a qualitative approach designed to enable a better understanding of multiple family members' perceptions and reveal the meanings they

**Table 1.** Demographic Information on Mothers and Adult Children.

Characteristics	Turkish Sample	American Sample
Mothers	N = 14	N = 14
Age in years (mean)	76.8	77.5
Widowed (%)	71.4	71.4
Adult children	N = 28	N = 28
Age in years (mean)	48.3	47.3
Married (%)	88.3	71.4
Parents (%)	78.6	71.4
Family size (mean)	4.3	4.3
Daughters (%)	51.0	51.0

attach to their interactions and relationships (Berg & Lune, 2012; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004; Reczek, 2014). We believe that this particular approach allows us to understand how adult children perceive within-family differences in their mothers' ties with themselves and their siblings, as well as the possible outcomes of these ties in their lives. A qualitative approach also provides a more detailed and deeper insight on adult children's explanations for their perceived within-family differences in ties with mothers.

The portion of the Turkish study that focused on maternal favoritism and sibling conflict was designed to provide a direct comparison between non-Turkish families in the United States and Turkish families. The first wave of the U.S. study was conducted several years prior to the Turkish study, which allowed the lead author to draw from the U.S. study in designing the Turkish interview protocol. For some items (e.g., maternal favoritism regarding emotional closeness), the wording of items was identical; in other cases (e.g., sibling conflict during caregiving), the wording was not identical, but the measure in the Turkish study was designed to capture the same construct as that of the U.S. study.

In this study, we used a single dimension of maternal favoritism—mother's emotional closeness. Both Turkish and American adult children's perceptions of maternal favoritism regarding emotional closeness at the time that their mothers needed care were measured by the question, *to which child in your family is your mother the most emotionally close?* If they perceived their mothers favored a specific adult child in the family, respondents were also asked to provide an explanation for their choice. To analyze adult children's reports of sibling conflict during caregiving, we looked at different sets of questions in the Turkish and American sample. In both studies, these questions were embedded within a longer interview protocol in which



respondents were asked to discuss a wide variety of positive and negative dimensions of caregiving and to provide rich detail about these experiences in their own words. In the Turkish study, adult children were asked *have you had any tensions and/or conflicts with your siblings regarding caregiving for your parent*. If they said yes, they were asked to provide more detail. American adult children were asked these following questions: (1) *Was your sibling/were any of your siblings critical of the ways in which you helped your mother, including how you helped or the amount of time you spent helping* and (2) *Have you ever been critical of the ways in which your sibling/any of your siblings helped your mother, including how they helped or the amount of time spent helping*. If they answered the first question as yes, they were asked to provide further information on which sibling was critical and what they have said. If they answered the second question as yes, they were asked to provide more detail. Additionally, we looked for any further mention of sibling conflict in Turkish and American adult children's reports throughout the entire transcript.

Analysis of the qualitative data took several steps. In the case of the U.S. study, a group of six advanced graduate students who worked on the project at least 2–3 years transcribed all of the interviews. The Research Assistants met with the project Primary Investigator weekly to discuss coding decisions regarding maternal favoritism and conflict among siblings. Codes assigned by the RAs were shared with the group and in the case of any discrepancies, discussed until consensus was met. The coding of data from the Turkish study was based on the coding decisions made in the U.S. study. The PIs of the U.S. and Turkish study and other authors on the present article examined the qualitative data. Where there was any disagreement between authors in their interpretation of data, discussions were arranged to reach intercoder consensus using the consensus approach based upon the group interactive analysis component of Borkan's (1999) "immersion/crystallization" method for analyzing qualitative data. All names used in the qualitative section are pseudonyms.

## Findings

Several themes emerged from our analysis of qualitative data. Turkish adult children predominantly emphasized gender as an explanation of their perceptions of maternal favoritism, whereas socioemotional aspects of the mother–child relationship were provided as an explanation for American adult children's perceptions. Additionally, perceptions of maternal favoritism affected sibling relationships during caregiving in Turkish families more directly than in American families.

## **Cross-Cultural Comparisons of Adult Children's Perceptions of Maternal Favoritism During Caregiving**

The majority of adult children in both Turkish and American families perceived some sort of maternal differential treatment. Eighty-two percent (23) of Turkish adult children and 93% (26) of American adult children reported that their mother favored a child in terms of emotional closeness. However, there were striking gender differences in Turkish and American adult children's reports of who they perceived their mother favored. Eighty-three percent (19) of Turkish adult children who perceived maternal favoritism reported that their mother favored a son, whereas only 17% perceived that a daughter was favored. Conversely, 62% (16) of American adult children who perceived maternal favoritism reported that a daughter was favored by their mother, whereas 38% perceived their mother favored a son. Furthermore, there was a greater consensus in Turkish families in terms of their perceptions of which adult child the mother was most emotionally close to. Eighty-seven percent (20) of Turkish adult children who reported favoritism agreed on who was favored by their mother, whereas only 55% (14) of American adult children had consensus in their reports.

### ***Adult Children's Explanations for Their Perceptions of Maternal Favoritism***

Adult children's explanations for their mothers' favoritism also differed substantially in Turkish versus American families. Table 2 presents the distribution of these explanations for perceptions of maternal favoritism provided by Turkish and American adult children. Most commonly, Turkish adult children explained their mothers' favoritism of a particular offspring on the basis of gender, mainly as higher filial expectations from sons. Gender was mentioned only by one American adult child who explained his mother's favoritism as the result of gender similarity between mothers and daughters. Instead, more than half of American adult children reported that their mother was most emotionally close to a specific child because of contact and support exchanges, whereas only about one fifth of Turkish adult children provided this explanation. Other explanations for maternal favoritism by Turkish and American adult children included value similarity with mother, birth order, adult child's problem(s), adult child's personality, and proximity to mother.

Turkish adult children's explanations for their perceptions of maternal favoritism predominantly centered around the gendered filial expectations, namely, why they perceived their mother was most emotionally close to a

**Table 2.** Adult Children’s Explanations for Their Perceptions of Maternal Favoritism (in %).

Explanation Type	Turkish Sample	American Sample
Ns	N = 23 <sup>a</sup>	N = 26 <sup>a</sup>
Gender	43.5	3.8
Contact and support exchanges	21.7	57.7
Value similarity	—	23.1
Birth order	21.7	7.7
Adult child’s problem(s)	13.0	—
Adult child’s personality	—	3.8
Proximity	—	3.8

<sup>a</sup>Number of adult children who reported that their mother favored an offspring.

son. In most Turkish families, both daughters and sons alike perceived this gendered differential treatment of their mothers; however, their explanations for this gendered favoritism differed. For example, Gulsen and Sibel explained that they perceived their mothers as most emotionally close to their brothers simply due to the issue of parental preference of sons.

Women of this cohort have a keenness in sons. (Gulsen, Turkish daughter)

Dads and moms always want a son but why? You know this idiom: he will be the one who keeps the fire on. Maybe it is because of that. They like their son to look after them. (Sibel, Turkish daughter)

Turkish sons’ explanations provided additional understanding of why they perceived themselves as favored. For example, Mesut and Duran explained that their mothers were most emotionally close to them because sons were considered as the carriers of the family name to the next generation.

Because I am the only son, I am different. I am the one who would carry the family name. This is why I have always been spoiled. Not only by just my mom but also by my sisters. They also love me the most. I never used this against them. I never treated anyone bad, I love them all. (Mesut, Turkish son)

My mother’s favorite kid has always been me. Because we’re from Eastern part of Turkey, as you know, every parent there wants a son. When they had three daughters following my birth, I became priceless. When the third daughter was born, my dad did not even come home. Then, my younger brother was born, and he was also loved by both of my parents a lot. With his birth, the survival of

the family name was secured. I had a heart problem when I was a kid, they were worried if something happens to me, there would not be any son to carry out the family name to the next generation. (Duran, Turkish son)

Based on these Turkish adult children's reports, we understand that favoritism of a specific offspring by mothers regarding emotional closeness was perceived as the result of societal norms dictating a preference for sons in Turkish society. In contrast, the majority of American adult children explained their perception of maternal favoritism based on socio-emotional aspects of the relationship, such as greater value similarity, contact, and support exchanges. For example, Thomas and Bernard explained that their mothers were most emotionally close to children who are in frequent contact with her.

Because I am the only one who has a relationship with my mother on a day to day basis or talks to her regularly. (Thomas, American son)

Um ( . . . ) just because they've spent more time together. (Bernard, American son)

In American families, value similarity between mother and adult child was provided as another type of explanation for adult children's perceptions of maternal favoritism. Melanie and Arnold emphasized that they were most similar to their mothers, sharing her values, and, therefore, their mothers were most emotionally close to them.

Um, well I think because, you know like I said before, we are, I mean we understand each other and we just you know, share each other's issues and problems. (Melanie, American daughter)

Because um we seem to have the ability to get at each other's emotions and, therefore we have ups and downs and seem to truly understand each other quite intimately—we can talk frank to each other and that kind of thing. (Arnold, American son)

These explanations show that socioemotional similarity in parent–adult child relationships was a prominent theme in American families. Mothers were perceived to be most emotionally close to a specific offspring because they were more like her regardless of their gender.

Furthermore, American daughters were more likely than sons to have perceived themselves as the child their mother was most emotionally

close to due to the emotional support they provided her. Both Kaitlin and Rose explained how their mothers turned to them for emotional issues and how they have always been there when their mothers experienced an emotionally distressful situation. They perceived that their history of emotional support exchanges with their mother was the reason for why they were favored.

Because she confides her emotional, when she's in emotional distress in particular, or happiness, but um she will confide those things in me—or to me. (Kaitlin, American daughter)

Just because that's—I don't know, why did I mention myself? I guess that's the role I've played in—maybe even more so since she's aged. I am the emotional support. (Rose, American daughter)

In Turkish families, only one fifth of adult children reported contact and support exchanges as an explanation for their perceptions of maternal favoritism. In fact, Turkish adult children predominantly perceived their mothers as most emotionally close to sons regardless of contact and support exchanges. Nilgun and Asli expressed that their mothers valued their sons over their daughters even though it was predominantly daughters who had more frequent contact and provided both emotional and instrumental support to their mothers.

My mom loves my brother the most. For her, whatever we do—bad or good—daughters are not as valuable as him. (Nilgun, Turkish daughter)

If you ask her about both daughters and sons, she would value sons more. We couldn't figure out why exactly. Daughters are the ones who care for her, she communicates with daughters better, we don't have any disrespect for her. Whenever we visit her, she does not smile to us. When my older or younger brother comes, her face changes suddenly. (Asli, Turkish daughter)

In some of these Turkish families, sons also expressed that their mother favored them over their sisters regardless of their support and contact exchanges with her. For example, Ahmet explained that his mother remembered and valued even the smallest thing he did, whereas his sisters did not receive the same treatment from their mother.

She never mentions about it but my sisters always tease her as “You always do everything for your son, you don't do it for us”. For example, she remembers when I visit her, she never remembers my sisters' visits. (Ahmet, Turkish son)

Overall, in Turkish families, the majority of adult children perceived their mother's favoritism of one of her offspring over others, predominantly a son, as resulting from societal norms regarding gendered filial expectations. In American families, on the other hand, socioemotional aspects of ties with mothers were provided by most adult children as an explanation for their perceptions of maternal favoritism.

### *Consequences of Adult Children's Perceptions of Maternal Favoritism on Sibling Conflict During Caregiving*

Qualitative analyses revealed that adult children's perceptions of maternal favoritism had substantial consequences on sibling relationships during caregiving in both Turkish and American families. In both studies, it was predominantly caregiving daughters who reported conflicts over siblings' cooperation in caregiving. However, the impact of perceptions of maternal favoritism on sibling relationships in Turkish families was more direct than in American families.

In Turkish families, daughters who provided help to their mother but did not perceive themselves as favored reported sibling conflict over issues related to cooperation during caregiving. Mainly, these daughters' perceptions of their brothers as favored by their mother despite their lack of cooperation in caregiving produced tension and conflicts among siblings. Some Turkish daughters, such as Sibel and Dole, expressed their frustration over lack of cooperation from their respective brothers by also stating that caregiving should primarily be their brothers' responsibility.

I am saying that my brother should be the one who is taking care of my mom. However, there are times that he is not even calling her on the phone. (Sibel, Turkish daughter)

He should propose that himself, it wouldn't happen by me saying him to do. I told him once that it's up to sons to take care of parents. He still asks me who will buy this, who will buy that. He always thinks about his own benefit. (Dole, Turkish daughter)

Because Turkish daughters perceived that their mother favored sons regardless of the help daughters provided her, some became less willing to continue helping their mother. For example, Mualla expressed that one of her sisters perceived her brother as favored, which encumbered her cooperation in caregiving.

My second oldest sister is out of our parent care system. She told my mom 'who you love the most should take care of you' and stopped helping her. She is talking about my youngest brother since my mom gets pleased with any little thing he does although we, as daughters, do the most for her. (Mualla, Turkish daughter)

Some Turkish daughters reported serious conflicts due to the lack of cooperation from their favored brothers. For example, Gulsen said she was so frustrated with her brothers' lack of support and interest in their mother's situation that she did not share information on her mother's location with them. Although Gulsen perceived that her mother was most emotionally close to her sons, she declared that her brothers did not deserve this favoritism.

I had not given the address of my mom's house to my brothers when I took her to this city. I did not tell them. I was so angry at them back then; this is why I did that. I told them on the phone 'you do not deserve your mom'. If they deserved their mom, I would have given them the address. (Gulsen, Turkish daughter)

In American families, in comparison, adult daughters' perceptions of maternal favoritism had more indirect consequences on sibling relationships. American daughters provided care to their mothers predominantly because they perceived themselves as most emotionally close to her. These adult daughters were more likely to feel that they have a responsibility to take on caregiving duties; however, they felt unhappy with the lack of care their siblings provided. Therefore, the unequal cooperation of their siblings contributed to the conflicts, especially from the perspective of these caregiving and favored adult children. Adult daughters often experienced the brunt of this burden because they were more likely to perceive that they were favored by their mothers, as presented in the explanations of Jackie and Kaitlin.

Especially my sisters, my brothers don't even say anything about it, I mean I think they would do anything my folks asked them, but my folks don't ask them for help and my sisters think my folks should just hire people to do everything. And what I keep telling them you know, older people don't like strangers in the house because then someone still has to supervise them and tell them what to do and family members know what it is that they need help doing and you should just do it. But they don't feel that that is their role. (Jackie, American daughter)

With this brother Arthur, who, in my view, limits his help, has helped her to her financial needs, but does not, um, her social or emotional needs are not at all attended to by him, or have not until recently. (Kaitlin, American daughter)

In some American families, caregiving daughters who perceived themselves as favored by their mother also reported conflicts arising from their siblings' criticisms. As Diane and Rose explained, their siblings condemned them for not providing adequate support to their mother despite the fact that these siblings were the ones who did not cooperate.

Just general criticism that I am not doing enough. (Diane, American daughter)

Um, you know, sometimes there will be a little conflict as to why I am not staying with them. And I would just have to say I will just have to see her and I am gonna stay with her. (Rose, American daughter)

In sum, these reports by Turkish and American adult daughters revealed that perceptions of maternal favoritism had negative consequences on sibling conflict during caregiving in both societies but provided different explanations for the conflict. Turkish caregiving daughters expressed intensive sibling conflict due to the lack of cooperation from their brothers who were perceived to be favored by their mother. In comparison, American caregiving daughters reported sibling conflict arising from the unequal burden of caregiving on their shoulders and criticisms regarding their contributions because their mothers were most emotionally close to them.

## Discussion

Cross-cultural comparisons of maternal favoritism as perceived by adult children during caregiving in Turkish and American families revealed both similarities and differences between these two societies. In both societies, older mothers were predominantly perceived to favor an adult child regarding emotional closeness during caregiving. However, Turkish and American adult children had different ideas as to whom mothers were most emotionally close. Within the Turkish context, there was a clear gendered pattern such that the majority of adult children perceived sons as favored by their mothers. In contrast, American adult children were more likely to perceive that daughters were favored, although this gendered pattern was not as strong.

There are also notable differences between Turkish and American adult children's explanations for their perceptions of maternal favoritism. In Turkish families, adult children perceived that gender played a key role in



explaining who was favored. Turkish adult sons were perceived to be favored by mothers mainly because of gendered filial expectations. Among American adult children, socioemotional aspects of parent–child ties were perceived to result in a specific adult child being favored by their mother regardless of the child’s gender. Although we found that explanations for mothers’ preferences among American children were much less explicitly gendered and much more likely to be based in socioemotional factors, we must consider that gender still plays a role in these processes, albeit indirectly. Daughters were more likely to perceive that their mothers were most emotionally close to them because they had more contact and support exchanges with them. This might reflect gendered filial expectations regarding support provision in the United States where daughters are often expected to assume caregiving responsibilities (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2005; Suito & Pillemer, 2006).

Turkish sibling dyads had greater consensus regarding their perceptions of which child was favored by their mother than American sibling dyads. The low levels of consensus among American sibling dyads are consistent with research by Suito, Sechrist, Steinhour, and Pillemer (2006), which has shown that there is a lack of congruence between American adult children’s and mothers’ reports of which child the mother favors. The higher likelihood of consensus in Turkish families could be a sign of the higher salience of societal norms dictating gendered filial responsibilities, which in turn strongly influence the parent–child relationships in Turkish society. These gendered filial responsibilities are still strongly shared by older generations in Turkey and continue to affect children throughout the life course. In American society by contrast, filial responsibilities and expectations are not as strictly and explicitly gendered; therefore, there may be more variability and uncertainty surrounding the expectations from adult children in terms of their responsibilities toward older parents. This situation might prevent American adult children from having consensus on who their mother favors.

Furthermore, perceptions of maternal favoritism had a detrimental impact on sibling ties, and this impact was more direct among Turkish than American siblings. These perceptions of maternal favoritism sometimes led to frustration among adult children who did not perceive themselves as favored but continued to provide support to their mothers. In particular, Turkish daughters who did not perceive themselves as favored reported conflicts regarding lack of cooperation from their brothers they perceived as favored, especially when mothers’ preferences were obvious to everyone.

In contrast, adult children’s perceptions of maternal favoritism had more indirect consequences on sibling ties in American families. American

daughters provided support to their mothers because they perceived their mothers as most emotionally close to themselves but reported conflicts over lack of cooperation from their siblings who were not perceived as favored. In addition to the unequal burden of providing care for older mothers due to favoritism, some of these American daughters received criticism from their siblings regarding the care they provided to their mothers. Both the burden and criticisms associated with the care responsibilities these American daughters assumed had detrimental consequences on their ties with siblings.

## **Conclusion**

Despite its small sample size and exploratory nature, this study provides insight into the importance of understanding how within-family differences in parent–adult child relationships might influence sibling ties during caregiving. Examining patterns of PDT has important implications for understanding sibling conflict, which may, in turn, affect the quality of care provided to older parents. Providing optimal care to parents often necessitates that siblings increase their contact with one another, especially to negotiate their responsibilities and coordinate care (Connidis & Kemp, 2008; Finch & Mason, 1993). However, sibling conflict often arises during these negotiations (Connidis, 2007; Ingersoll-Dayton, Neal, Ha, & Hammer, 2003; Lashewicz & Keating, 2009; Ngangana, Davis, Burns, McGee, & Montgomery, 2016; Tolkacheva et al., 2010), especially when siblings do not share caregiving responsibilities equally (Gentry, 2001; Khodyakov & Carr, 2009). Because such conflict may affect the quality of care older parents receive and the stress adult child caregivers experience, exploring cross-cultural variations in processes through which perceptions of PDT influence sibling conflict has important implications for both academics and professionals working on family caregiving.

Furthermore, even though some earlier studies have suggested that parents' preference for sons may be declining in Turkish society (Ataca et al., 2005; Aycicegi-Dinn & Kağıtçıbaşı, 2010), findings from this study provide support for continued son preference. This might be because, even with the declining instrumental support from sons, mothers nonetheless appear to continue attributing higher psychological value to sons than daughters in Turkey. When interpreting these findings, however, it is important to note that they are based on adult children's reports. It is possible that children's perceptions of son preference for emotional closeness did not reflect mothers' actual preferences. Perhaps adult children perceived mothers favoring their sons due to their awareness of strong son preference in Turkish society

rather than due to mothers' behaviors. On the other hand, it is important to note that the mothers included in this study were from a generation in which these gendered expectations are still widely accepted.

There are several issues further studies might help to elucidate. In this study, we only focused on one dimension of maternal favoritism: emotional closeness. Research has shown that disfavoritism and favoritism have different consequences for adult children's psychological well-being (Suitor, Gilligan, Peng, Jung, & Pillemer, 2017). Therefore, additional studies should focus on cross-cultural comparisons of patterns and consequences of multiple dimensions of maternal favoritism and disfavoritism, such as conflict, pride, and disappointment in addition to emotional closeness. This study also solely relied on adult children's perceptions of maternal favoritism, not mother's reports of favoritism. Studies have shown that there is discrepancy between adult children's and parent's reports on various aspects of their relationships with each other, including provision of support within and outside of the context of caregiving (Kim, Zarit, Birditt, & Fingerma, 2014; Kim, Zarit, Eggebeen, Birditt, & Fingerma, 2011; Mandemakers & Dykstra, 2008; Steinbach, Kopp, & Lazarevic, 2017; Suitor, Sechrist, Steinhour, & Pillemer, 2006). Future studies should examine cross-cultural variations in how adult children's perceptions of favoritism compare to their parents' reports. Moreover, studies have shown that maternal and paternal favoritism show distinct patterns and have different impacts on adult children (Gilligan et al., 2013; Suitor & Pillemer, 2013); therefore, future research should examine cross-cultural patterns and consequences of adult children's perceptions of maternal versus paternal favoritism. Finally, there is a substantial literature showing that both maternal favoritism and sibling relations affect well-being (e.g., Gilligan et al., 2017; Peng et al., 2016; Suitor et al., 2016; Suitor et al., 2017). Future studies should consider the consequences of adult children's perceptions of maternal favoritism and sibling conflict during caregiving on their well-being.

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