

**Gender, social disadvantage, and happiness:  
Women's emotion labor in Indian families**

Diane Coffey\*

Department of Sociology & Population Research Center  
University of Texas

Yiwen Wang

Department of Sociology & Population Research Center  
University of Texas

Aashish Gupta

Department of Sociology & Population Studies Center  
University of Pennsylvania

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**Abstract**

This study documents and contextualizes a new puzzle about reported happiness among married women using data from India, a large developing country with severe gender discrimination. Gender inequality has been widely documented in India. For example, prior studies show that women have less education and less decision-making power than men. Upon marriage, young women typically move to their husband's homes and assume low status roles in which they are expected to cook for, clean up after, and care for their husbands and in-laws. Qualitative research suggests that women who move into joint households with in-laws experience more stress than those who are married to the household head. We use World Health Organization's 2007-08 Survey of Global AGEing and Adult Health (SAGE) data to document gaps in self-reported happiness between men and women in India. We further use ordered logit regression to explore whether women's relationship to household head matters for their self-reported happiness. While the quantitative and ethnographic literature has found that women are objectively disadvantaged relative to men, we find that women are more likely to report being happy than men are. Regression results show that women who are daughters-in-law of the head of household are more likely to report happiness than those who are the wife of the household head. We posit that women's happiness advantage may be explained by their roles as service workers in their families. Young married women in India, especially those who live with parents-in-laws, may feel more compelled to perform happiness for and in their families, despite objective disadvantage.

Keywords: Gender disparities; Social disadvantage; Happiness; India

Word count: 8190

## INTRODUCTION

Research on happiness has been important for advancing sociological theory about how gender and social disadvantage operate in families. For instance, the literature has grappled with the puzzling finding that homemakers in high-income, Western countries, often report themselves to be happier than women with paid employment (Feree 1984; Treas et al. 2011). Although paid employment offers women greater autonomy and economic security, it is also associated with discontent, especially in places without social policies to support working parents (Glass et al. 2016). Investigations of women's happiness and work in Western countries have pointed to role conflict, status conflict, and pressures to conform to gender expectations as ways that gender influences outcomes (Risman 2009).

But other examples of social disadvantage in the happiness literature contrast with that of women's paid employment. In contrast with the complexity of findings on happiness and gender, research on race, ethnicity and happiness seem to fit more neatly into parsimonious theoretical frameworks about social disadvantage and well-being. Research spanning several decades finds that Blacks and Latinos in the United States report being less happy than Whites (Coverdill et al. 2011; Hughes & Thomas 1998; Thomas & Hughes 1996; Yang 2008). This disparity is partially explained by observable differences in objective well-being, such as in economic status or education, but is hypothesized to also reflect experiences of discrimination and dissatisfaction with the slow pace of social change (Coverdill et al. 2011).

The richness of these empirical results demonstrates that happiness is a fertile field in which to advance conceptual understandings of gender and social disadvantage. To what extent do gendered patterns of happiness match those of other forms of social disadvantage outside high-income, Western settings? And, what can this teach us about how gender operates? To advance these questions, we analyze data on women's and men's happiness in India.

Our investigations focus on the experiences of married women in particular. In India, marriage is nearly universal, and it is very often arranged by family members rather than the couple themselves (Allendorf & Pandian 2016). Women are expected to move into their husband's homes when they marry. Sometimes they live with their husbands' parents. Intrahousehold inequalities between men and women, and between parents-in-law and daughters-in-law, are deep, and women's roles within families are rigidly enforced. Investigating happiness in this context reveals a surprising pattern of self-reports, which we document and discuss in light of insights from the literature on happiness and emotional labor, and on the expectation that women and service workers perform happiness.

By many objective measures, the lives of women in India are much worse than the lives of men. For instance, Indian women's participation in the paid labor force is very low --- at 27 percent, India's women's labor force participation rate ranks lower than 170 out of 188 countries for which the International Labor Organization published data in 2016. In contrast, the share of household work done by Indian men is among the lowest in the world (ILO 2018). India also has among the lowest female to male sex ratios in the world, which reflects a preference for men and boys so strong that many families opt for sex selective abortions (Arnold et al. 2002; Kaur 2010) and neglect the health of female family members (Saikia & Bora 2015). In a unique pattern of female health disadvantage, female death rates in the age groups 0-4, 5-9, and 14-19 are higher than male death rates in these respective ages in India (GoI 2017). Even though girls in India began enrolling in primary school in large numbers in India in the 1990s, the 2011 Census found that women are still less substantially likely to get a secondary or tertiary education than men (GoI 2011).

Despite these objective disadvantages, our analysis reveals the surprising result that Indian women are more likely to report being very happy or happy on a large-scale quantitative survey. Even more surprisingly, the gender disparity in reported happiness is concentrated among younger women,

who, according both to the qualitative literature and to objective indicators, face more discrimination than older women (Das Gupta 1995).

Rather than indicate an *absence* of gender scripts, we argue that this finding *reveals* them (Lin, Desai and Chen 2020). As in the gendered contexts described by Clisby (2017), emotion in this context is “socioculturally situated...and embedded in normative social and moral codes regulating appropriate meanings of who should be happy” (2). Studying happiness among women and men in India is an opportunity to advance understanding of the mechanisms by which the salience of gender could obscure its consequences in socially-influenced sources of data, such as self-reported, quantitative happiness.

We posit that women’s happiness advantage in India could be explained by sociological theories of emotion work and of emotional labor that are characteristically associated with emotion management among people in low status roles (Hochschild 1983). Sociological theory often distinguishes between the *emotional labor* of service workers in the paid labor market and the *emotion work* done by women in their homes for the benefit of their families.

We begin by reviewing the literature on happiness and social disadvantage, cross-cultural perceptions of happiness, and the literature on gender, marriage and family in India. Next, we describe our data source, the World Health Organization's Survey of Global AGEing and Adult Health (SAGE), which was collected in India in 2007-08. In the Results section, we first apply a nonparametric method to show that women report more happiness than men and that women’s apparent happiness advantage is concentrated among young women. We then use parametric ordered logit regression analysis to explore whether a woman’s relationship to household head matters for their self-reported happiness. Finally, we discuss our results in the context of new and existing frameworks about reported happiness, social inequality and gender, and emotion management within families.

## BACKGROUND

### *Happiness, Gender, and social Disadvantage in Western, Developed Societies*

Social disadvantage is typically correlated with worse subjective well-being, as measured by reported happiness and perceived quality of life. For example, several studies find that people from social groups that experience discrimination, including Blacks and Latinos in the United States, report less happiness and lower quality of life than Whites (Coverdill et al., 2011; Hughes & Thomas, 1998). Further, people with less education consistently report less happiness than people with more education, independent of measures of economic status (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004; Easterlin, 2001).

Yet, studies of gender and happiness have sometimes complicated this apparently straightforward theoretical framework. For instance, studies have found that housewives in Western societies report themselves to be happier than women who work full-time (Freree 1984; Treas et al. 2011). This is surprising considering that housework can be monotonous and underappreciated, and that work in the paid labor force can be accompanied by greater autonomy and economic well-being. It is also surprising considering that research on mental health and women's employment finds employed women report less distress than homemakers, with the exception of mothers of young children (Kessler & McRae 1987).

Women's reported happiness may also reflect the perceived social desirability of certain types of self-reports. Freree (1984) found that women whose responses to questions on topics other than happiness were more socially desirable also reported themselves to be happier. This suggests that women's happiness responses may reflect social expectations of their happiness as well as their objective conditions. Stevenson and Wolfers (2009), who study differences in happiness between men and women in the 1970s in the United States, present results that cohere with Freree's: they show that

women reported more happiness than men during a period in which women faced high burdens of monotonous housework and relatively severe forms of social inequality.

Recent research characterizing happiness as an important component of emotional well-being, conceptualized alongside other primary emotions, such as anger, fear, and sadness (Turner 2009; Turner & Stets 2005), suggests that the emotional nature of happiness may make it a difficult concept to measure with self-reports in some contexts. Ahmed (2012) critiques the field of happiness science, pointing out that “much of the new science of happiness is premised on the model of feelings as transparent” (6) as well as on the “unmotivated and uncomplicated nature of self-reporting” (5). Ahmed further sees many happiness studies as “re-describing” what society *values* as good as *actually being* good (7). In contexts of highly gendered expectations, understanding reported happiness may require understanding culturally-specific patriarchal frameworks, and how those frameworks interact with emotion (Clisby 2017).

### *Cross-Cultural Perceptions of Happiness*

Perception of happiness bears important cultural signatures (Uchida & Kitayama 2009). A cross-cultural review of happiness highlights that happiness is defined and perceived differently in Asian cultures than that in European-American cultures. While in Western cultures happiness is associated with personal achievements, in East Asian cultures happiness comes from “a realization of social harmony” (Uchida et al. 2004). Different from the western hedonistic notion of happiness, the Indian perspective considers self-regulation important for sustaining happiness and well-being (Nagar 2018). From a traditional Indian perspective, happiness doesn’t come to those who intentionally seek it, but comes to people who perform their righteous duties with humility (Gotise & Upadhyay 2018). This line of research emphasizes the importance of understanding social expectations and cultural values in shaping people’s reports of happiness.

## *Gender Discrimination, Marriage, and the Transition to Adulthood in India*

Gender discrimination in India is apparent even at the earliest ages: the 2015 National Family Health Survey found that there are only 916 girl children (ages zero to six) for every 1000 boy children (IIPS & ICF 2017). In the past, female infanticide was common in India (Das Gupta 1987); today sex-selective abortion of female fetuses explains much of the difference. A large body of literature documents discrimination against girl children: they are breastfed for shorter durations than boys (Jayachandran & Kuziemko 2011), receive less child care time (Barcellos et al. 2014), and fail to display some of the health advantages that are associated with being female in many other developing countries (Author 2018).

Although girls in India are more likely to be sent to school than they were in the past, less progress has been made on gender equality in education than in other South Asian countries, such as Bangladesh (Drèze & Sen 2013). Further, improvements in women's education have not translated into substantially more economic opportunities for women, nor into greater autonomy (Frick et al., 1986).

Marriage is nearly universal for young women. Although there has been a declining trend in the number of child marriages in India, there has been little increase in the age of marriage among those who marry after age 18 (Desai & Andrist 2010). Most marriages in India are arranged by parents or other relatives, and dowry is typically paid from the bride's family to the groom's family (Srinivasan & Lee, 2004). Less than 10 percent of women choose their own spouse, and many women meet their husbands for the first time on the day of the wedding (Allendorf, 2013; Allendorf & Pandian 2016). After marriage, women are expected to move to their husbands' homes, and to seek their husbands' or their in-laws' permission to visit their natal home. Married women are responsible for almost all of the housework and have few opportunities for paid employment (Luke et al., 2014). In the early years of marriage, which overlap with childbearing, women have very little autonomy, and often experience

abuse (Jeffrey 1996; Snell-Rood 2015). Divorce is extremely uncommon in India; its risk is higher among couples who have no male children (Bose & South, 2003).

Although paid labor force participation among young married women is low, young women nevertheless work hard. This hard work, combined with poor diets and discriminatory household practices around food (Parliwala 1993), is implicated in their poor health. Indeed, the NFHS-2015 data find that one in four women in their twenties is underweight; young women are significantly more likely to be underweight than both men of the same ages and older adults.

Recent survey evidence suggests that young women have accurate expectations of the constraints they will face in the transition to adulthood. The India Human Development Survey, 2011 (IHDS-II) asked young women between the ages of 15 and 18 when they expected to get married and when they expected to have children (Desai & Vanneman 2012). There is a strong match between what young women expected about these two major life course milestones and what was true in the population several years later. In 2011, half of young women interviewed by the IHDS said they expected to be married by age 22, and 99 percent said they expected to be married by age 30. The National Family Health Survey, 2015 (NFHS-4), a nationally representative Demographic and Health Survey carried out four years later, found that 69 percent of 22 year old women were married and that 97 percent of 30 year old women were married. Similarly, half of young women interviewed by the IHDS expected to have had a child by age 24 and about 95 percent expected to have had a child by age 30. Among married women in the NFHS-4, half indeed had a child by age 24 and 80 percent had a child by age 30. Infertility among the couple could be the reason why some women's expectations of having a child were not met (Jejeehoy, 1998).

One reason for the accuracy of young women's expectations is that variation in the basic demographic contours of the lives of women in India is low: marriage and child-bearing – the defining events of the transition to adulthood – occur within a narrow age range. Similarly, Indian women are

likely to have correct expectations about whether they will work outside the home: Afridi et al. (2018) find that, in contrast to increasing women's labor force participation in the rest of the world, Indian women's labor force participation has historically been low, and has been stagnant or slightly declining in recent years.

### *Gender, Service work within Households, and Emotion Management*

The Indian context provides an opportunity to make a novel extension of theories about emotional labor and emotion work. Emotional labor is the management of emotion that occurs in the paid labor force; Hochschild's (1983) classic example of flight attendants shows how service workers are expected to absorb the negative emotions of customers while projecting a cheerful disposition. Women are over-represented in jobs that require emotional labor, in part because they are socialized in their private lives to manage their own emotions and to respond positively to others.

In private life, the performance of emotion, especially of positive emotions – like encouraging others, interactive listening, and concern for others – is part of “doing gender” and of women's emotion work (Hochschild 1983; Hochschild 1990; West & Zimmerman 1987). Hochschild (1983) argues that women's financial dependence on men means that they do more emotion work, “especially emotion work that affirms, enhances, and celebrates the well-being and status of others” (165). Similarly, women's lower social status means that they do emotion work in order to display deference to higher ranking people.

Research on the lives of young women in India emphasizes the ways in which they are expected to enact their low social rank within their households. For instance, young, newly married women are expected to show deference to their husbands and in-laws by veiling their faces, by remaining quiet in their presence, by sitting on the floor, rather than on a chair or cot, and by eating their meals after others in the household have eaten (Chowdhry 1993; Jacobson & Wadley 1977; Jeffrey et al. 1989; Palriwala

1993). As women age, and their sons grow up and get married, they take on the role of a mother-in-law, rather than of a daughter-in-law. This leads to improvements in their social status and power within the household (Das Gupta 1995). With these transitions, the expectation that they display deference to others wanes.

The household labor that Indian women are expected to perform at different points in the life course maps closely onto this pattern of social status. During a period in which they have little say in their own lives, young women do the bulk of the household production and childcare. They are expected to work longer hours than older women, and to do more demanding tasks (Das Gupta, 1995; Author et al. 2019). Especially in rural areas, young women's daily work of preparing or collecting cooking fuel and food, caring for animals, washing clothes and utensils, and keeping house are extremely physically demanding (Hirway & Jose 2011; Sharma 2018). Although men and older women would rarely explicitly admit it, young women's labor is valuable, such that the marriage of one's daughter is seen as a gift that, along with transferring wealth in the form of dowry, transfers labor from the young woman's natal household to her in-laws (Jeffrey et al. 1989).

The prior literature on young womanhood and work in India makes little mention of the performance of happiness, perhaps because there has been little quantitative data on self-reported happiness. Nevertheless, this research suggests that expectations for women's emotion work may follow similar age patterns to the ones described above. Specifically, we hypothesize that just as the female service workers whom Hochschild studied learned to perform happiness, so too do young Indian women. One key difference, though, is that in the Indian context, emotion management would not take the form of a paid job but would rather be part of the household labor that is socially expected of them by their families, by themselves, and also, perhaps, by an interviewer.

This theory does not necessarily imply that young women actually *are* happier than men – it simply speaks to why they would *report* themselves to be happier. This interpretation coheres with prior

ethnographic research on the emotions of young women in India, which documents the extreme stress that they are under and the coping mechanisms that they employ (Jeffrey et al. 1989; Jeffrey & Jeffrey 1996).

We now turn to a description of our data, our analytic strategies, and to the presentation of results. We will conclude by revisiting these theoretical frameworks in light of the results.

## METHODS

### *Data and Measurement*

We analyze data from the World Health Organization's Survey of Global AGEing and Adult Health (SAGE), which was collected in India in 2007-08 (<http://apps.who.int/>). The aim of SAGE is to collect reliable data and advance scientific knowledge on aging and health in low- and middle- income countries. The SAGE household questionnaire includes a household roster and modules about the dwelling, income, transfers in and out of the household, assets and expenditures; the SAGE individual questionnaire contains modules on health and its determinants, disability, work history, risk factors, chronic conditions, caregiving, subjective well-being, health care utilization and health systems responsiveness (Kowal et al. 2012).

SAGE is representative of the adult populations (ages 18+) in six Indian states: Assam, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. These states were selected from among Indian states with populations of greater than five million based on their geographic region and level of economic and human development (WHO 2013). They are home to almost half of India's 1.2 billion people (ORG 2011).

SAGE used a multi-stage sampling process to select respondents in each state. In rural areas, a stratified random sample of villages was selected based on village population size. Within each village, 28 households were selected for participation in the survey. In urban areas, a stratified random sample of

city wards was selected based on ward population size. Within wards, SAGE selected two census enumeration blocks, from which 33 households were selected. In both urban and rural areas, respondents were chosen from within households using a household roster and a Kish grid (WHO 2013).

*Sample.* To show the happiness disparity between married men and women, we first restrict our sample to an age group for which the vast majority of both women and men are married. In particular, we restrict the sample to adults ages 28 and older. 98% of women and 97% of men in this age group are married or widowed in the WHO SAGE data. In the remaining analyses, we further restrict our sample to married women ages 28 to 50 because this is the age range in which women report greater happiness than men.

*Dependent variable.* The primary dependent variable in our analysis is self-reported happiness. Survey respondents were asked the question: “Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are these days? Are you very unhappy, unhappy, neither happy nor unhappy, happy, or very happy?” In our regression analyses, we use the full range of responses to this question. Other results use a dichotomized coding of this question (very happy or happy vs. other responses) for simplicity.

*Independent variable of interest.* The main independent variable is the married woman’s relationship to household head. We identify a woman as daughter-in-law of household head or as the wife of household head through household roster which asks about each individual’s relationship to the household head. In a small number of cases, married women are listed as the household head; we group these women with those who are married to the household head. It is possible that women who are wife of the household head or the household head themselves also live with a parent-in-law who is not identified as household head, perhaps due to advanced age or disability. In Appendix 1, we present the results of sensitivity analyses that show that excluding this group of women ( $n=216$ ) does not change our conclusions.

*Control variables.* In our ordered logit analysis, we adjust for the fact that daughters-in-law of household heads have a different distribution of educational outcomes than wives of the household head. It is important to adjust for this difference in our results because education has been shown to predict life evaluation across a variety of contexts (Yang 2008; Blanchflower & Oswald 2004). We create five educational attainment categories (no education, 1-5 years, 6-8 years, 9-12 years, more than 12 years) based roughly on quintiles of educational attainment in the entire sample.

We also control for the number of assets an individual's household owns, and the household's log of monthly household expenditure per capita, which is an estimate based on a respondent's answer to the question: "In general, what is your household's average overall monthly spending?" This is because households in which a married woman is daughter-in-law of the head tend to be wealthier than households in which young women are married to the household head. Additionally, the regression analysis controls for whether or not the individual reports having formal (public or private sector, rather than self-employed or informal) paid work at the time of the survey. We do not expect this control to make a difference to our results because very few women in the sample have formal, paid employment, but we include the control because the entrance of women into the paid labor force has been important to understanding their happiness in developed country settings. Finally, SAGE collected demographic data for each respondent, including age, and social group membership, that is, whether the respondent is Dalit (Scheduled Caste), Muslim, Adivasi (Scheduled Tribe), or belongs to none of these three disadvantaged social groups. We adjust for these characteristics of respondents because they are important dimensions of social inequality in India.

#### ANALYTIC STRATEGIES

First, we apply a nonparametric approach—a local polynomial regression to describe the relationship between age and self-reported happiness for men and women without assuming a functional form (Deaton 1997). This approach presents the distribution of happiness across different ages for both

men and women. Second, we use parametric ordered logit regression analysis to show the happiness disparities among married women in a regression framework. The advantage of the ordered logit regression analysis over the non-parametric approach is that there are standard inference procedures that allow us to test the statistical significance of our results after controlling for relevant demographic and education variables.

Because the happiness variable is measured using five ordered categories (very unhappy, unhappy, neither happy nor unhappy, happy, or very happy), we estimate an ordered logit regression model to fit this ordered, discrete outcome. Ordered logit models have previously been used to study other disparities in ordered health outcomes, including disparities in self-reported health by sex and marital status (Gorman & Read 2006; Zheng & Thomas 2013).

In an ordered logit model, a latent variable  $h^*$  is assumed to be a linear function of the independent variables, with an error term with a logistic distribution. The ordered outcome categories correspond to cutpoints in the continuous distribution of  $h^*$  that are unobservable parameters fit by maximum likelihood (Rodríguez 2007).

We write the linear model for  $h^*$  as:

$$h_{ij}^* = \beta_1 \text{daughter-in-law}_{ij} + A_{ij}\eta + \beta_2 \text{Muslim}_{ij} + \beta_3 \text{Scheduled Caste}_{ij} + \beta_4 \text{Adivasi}_{ij} \\ + E_{ij}\theta + A_{ij}\lambda + \beta_5 \ln(\text{expenditure}_{ij}) + \beta_6 \ln(\text{expenditure}_{ij})^2 + \beta_7 \text{formal}_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij},$$

where  $\varepsilon_{ij}$  has a logistic distribution and the ordered logit link function additionally includes four cutpoints for the five possible levels of reported happiness. Subscripts  $i$  index respondents and subscripts  $j$  index survey primary sampling units, which are villages or urban census enumeration blocks.

$\text{daughter-in-law}_{ij}$  is an indicator for whether a woman is daughter-in-law (rather than spouse) of the household head.  $A_{ij}\eta$  is a set of three indicators for age group;  $E_{ij}$  is a set of five indicators for

educational attainment;  $A_{ij}$  is a set of five indicators for asset wealth;  $Muslim_{ij}$ ,  $Scheduled\ Caste_{ij}$ , and  $Adivasi_{ij}$  are controls for social group the individual belongs to,  $\log(expenditure_{ij})$  and  $\log(expenditure_{ij})^2$  are controls for log monthly household expenditure and log monthly household expenditure squared.  $formal_{ij}$  controls for whether or not the individual has formal paid employment. In the table presenting ordered logit regression results, we add controls in stages to understand how the controls influence the interpretation of the variables of interest.

## RESULTS

### *Descriptive Results*

Figure 1 presents the results of a local polynomial regression of an indicator for reporting oneself to be “happy” or “very happy” on age in years, separately for men and women ages 28 and older. This figure provides a simple illustration of the “happiness puzzle”: despite being socially disadvantaged than men— both inside and outside the home— women report being happier than men in India. Moreover, women’s happiness advantage is concentrated among younger women, and not present for women above the age of 50. However, between the ages of 28 and 50, the gap is substantial and statistically significant, as shown by the fact that the confidence intervals for women’s and men’s reported happiness in this age range do not overlap.

[Figure 1 about here]

Next, we shift focus to married women ages 28-50 to examine whether their relationship to household head matters for their self-reported happiness. Figure 2 presents the fraction of women who reported each level of happiness, from “very unhappy” to “very happy” by their relationship to household head. A comparison of the distributions shows that women who are daughter-in-law of household head are more likely to report themselves “happy” or “very happy” than women who are spouse of household head or household head themselves.

[Figure 2 about here]

Table 1 further displays descriptive statistics of women who are daughter-in-law of household head and who are spouse of household head or household head themselves. Women who are daughter-in-law of household head are 16 percentage points more likely to report themselves “happy” or “very happy” than women who are spouse of household head or household head themselves. Women who are daughter-in-law of household head are younger; more likely to be educated; live in households with more assets and less monthly expenditure, on average; are less likely to belong to a disadvantaged social group; and less likely to be formally employed than the married women who are spouse of household head or household head themselves. The estimates in Table 1, like all of the results presented in the paper, use the survey weights provided by SAGE to produce representative estimates of the population of the 6 states included in the survey. However, the difference in self-reported happiness should be interpreted with caution because it did not adjust for differences in other characteristics between the two groups.

[Table 1 about here]

### *Ordered Logit Regression Results*

Table 2 presents the results of the ordered logit regression models described above. Column 1 shows the uncontrolled association between reported happiness and being daughter-in-law of household head: married women who are daughter-in-law of household head have about 2.2 times the proportional odds of reporting an additional level of happiness compared to married women who are spouse of household head or household head themselves. Controls for household assets introduced in column 2, slightly decrease the magnitude of the coefficient on being daughter-in-law of household. The introduction of social group, age, education, household expenditure, and formal employment controls (in columns 3) does not change the association between happiness and being daughter-in-law of household

head by much. The fully controlled model in Column 3 suggests that daughter-in-law of household head have about 1.5 times the proportion odds of reporting an additional level of happiness relative to other married women.

## DISCUSSION

We note that long-term ethnographic research documents, in young women's own voices, the quotidian hardships that are evinced by objective quantitative indicators about their lives (Jeffrey et al. 1988; Jeffrey & Jeffrey 1996). Further, a mixed methods study from rural West Bengal that focused on understanding young women's lived experiences in their marriages found that many women were profoundly unhappy and those who lived with their parents-in-law experienced more psychological distress than those living in nuclear families (Ghosh et al. 2017). The contrast between the findings of these prior studies, on the one hand, and this paper's quantitative findings on survey-reported happiness, on the other, may be explained by a modified version of theories about gender and emotion management.

Theories of women's happiness and emotion management from the United States context have found it helpful to distinguish between the emotional labor performed by paid service workers, and the emotion work performed by women in their family lives. In the Indian context, however, service work *within the home* is a central and defining aspect of young womanhood. By their late twenties, nearly all women in India are married. As Jeffrey, Jeffrey, and Lyon (1989) point out, a primary role of a young married woman in Indian society is that of a service worker in the *household* economy. Very few women in India have the sort of formal, paid employment of the sort that has been of interest to the sociologists studying developed countries. Young women are, however, expected to attend to the wants and needs of their husbands and in-laws, to clean clothes and dishes, to tend to young children and animals, and to prepare food. These tasks involve hard and unpleasant work: for example, the majority

of women interviewed by the NFHS 2015 used solid fuels (such as wood, grass, and dried cow dung) to prepare food (IIPS & ICF 2017), which is time-consuming and involves breathing dangerous amounts of smoke (Author et al. 2019). In north India, where *roti*, a time- and labor-intensive flat bread, is a staple of the diet, young women are often expected to eat after they have served other family members hot, freshly made breads. When women become mothers-in-law, they expect their daughters-in-law to take on these duties.

The fact that we see a women's happiness advantage for young women, but not for older women, provides an important indication that the roles of young married women as service workers may be implicated in the happiness puzzle. Much as the service workers Hochschild studied were expected to perform happiness for strangers, young women in India may be expected to perform happiness for their husbands' families, who at least in the early days of a marriage, are often strangers to her. The fact that married women who are daughters-in-law of the head of household are more likely to report happiness than those who are the wife of the household head further supports this interpretation. To anthropologists' observations that young married women in India are expected to act "diffident, shy, and self-effacing" (Mandelbaum 1988), we would add that, when asked, they may also be expected to perform happiness.

Although women's age patterns of reported happiness relative to men's, as well as our reading of the qualitative literature, suggest that the happiness puzzle that we document may indicate emotional labor that they do as household service workers, there is little in the quantitative data that would help definitively establish this as the explanation for the gaps we see. Further efforts to understand women's self-reported happiness in India are needed. Specifically, mixed methods studies could pair quantitative self-reports of happiness with qualitative interviews and ethnographic research on emotion to understand why women may feel compelled to report happiness, and whether this applies to other positive emotions as well. The collection of qualitative interview data on this topic may be constrained by the fact that

young women are often given little privacy to interact with strangers; ethnographic data may therefore be more informative.

A few limitations need to be noted. First, we are not able to directly test emotion work performance given data availability. By comparing happiness of married women who are daughter-in-law of household heads to that of the others, our results suggest that the paradoxical happiness advantage of women should be attributed to the emotion work that is normatively expected of them in the Indian context. A direction for future research should be to directly evaluate women's emotion work performance as a mechanism in explaining the happiness puzzle. Second, the ordered logit approach we apply here constrains the covariates to have the same linear effect latent on mental health at each cut point. Because odds are ratios of probabilities, a uniform effect on odds could have different effects on probabilities that are low, moderate or high. Third, we acknowledge that other unobserved factors like personality, depressive symptoms, and gender attitudes may affect reporting of happiness. Future research should collect related information to address this limitation.

## CONCLUSION

This paper documents the novel result that despite objective social disadvantage, and a highly constrained transition to adulthood, young women in India report greater happiness than men. We posit that this may be due to expectations that women perform emotional labor alongside the physical labor that is expected of them in the home. As such, we suspect that the quantitative self-reports of happiness are importantly performative, rather than unambiguous measures of emotional well-being. The fact that women's apparent happiness advantage is concentrated among young women, and those who are daughters-in-law of the household head coheres both with prior research on emotion management among people in low status roles, and with prior research on Indian women's labor and life courses.

Exploring women's happiness in the Indian context, in which gender discrimination is severe, suggests ways that researchers might revisit trends in women's happiness in the United States as well. Women's reported happiness has been declining since the 1970s, when gender discrimination was more severe (Stevenson & Wolfers 2009). Much as we might think that the happiness reported by young Indian women in quantitative surveys may have a performative element, it may have been the case that there is more performance involved in women's answers to survey questions about happiness in the 1970s than has been previously acknowledged.

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Table 1. Summary statistics for married women 28 to 50

	Daughter-in-law of head		Wife of head or head		All married women 28-50	
	mean	sd	mean	sd	mean	sd
Very happy or happy	0.78	0.05	0.62	0.02	0.64	0.02
Mean # of assets (out of 16)	8.78	0.39	6.72	0.12	6.97	0.13
Social group categories						
Adivasi	0.02		0.07		0.06	
Dalit	0.07		0.2		0.19	
Muslim	0.06		0.12		0.11	
Other (OBC, General, other)	0.85		0.61		0.64	
Age categories						
28-34	0.64		0.28		0.33	
35-41	0.29		0.4		0.38	
42-50	0.07		0.32		0.29	
Years of education categories						
No education	0.38		0.54		0.52	
1 to 5	0.14		0.18		0.18	
6 to 8	0.13		0.14		0.14	
9 to 12	0.25		0.1		0.12	
More than 12	0.11		0.04		0.05	
Mean log expenditure	6.13	0.06	6.21	0.03	6.2	0.03
Formal paid Employment	0.05	0.02	0.06	0.01	0.06	0.01
<i>N</i>	201		1,888		2,183	

Note: Sample is restricted to married women 28 to 50.

Table 2. Results of ordered logit regression of happiness among married women aged 28-50

Happiness (1 is "very unhappy", 5 is "very happy")			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Daughter-in-law of HH head	2.023*** (0.427)	1.508+ (0.323)	1.469+ (0.336)
Household assets (ref= 0-4 assets)			
5 or 6 assets		1.418* (0.221)	1.407* (0.206)
7 or 8 assets		2.345*** (0.426)	2.292*** (0.414)
9 or 10 assets		2.996*** (0.678)	2.429*** (0.591)
More than 10 assets		5.486*** (1.506)	3.712*** (0.930)
Adivasi			0.688 (0.163)
Muslim			0.667+ (0.140)
Scheduled Caste			0.930 (0.153)
Age group (ref= 28-35)			
35-42			0.963 (0.143)
>42			0.989 (0.166)
Education (ref= no education)			
1-5 years			0.788 (0.154)
6-8 years			0.969 (0.174)
9-12 years			1.420 (0.401)
More than 12 years			1.490 (0.635)
Log expenditure			0.0897* (0.101)
Log expenditure squared			1.224* (0.111)
Formal paid employment			1.140 (0.223)
N	2,183	2,183	2,183

Note: The table presents exponentiated coefficients (odds ratios) from ordered logit regression equations, as described in the Analytic Strategy section. Clustered standard errors are given in parentheses. + p<0.01, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

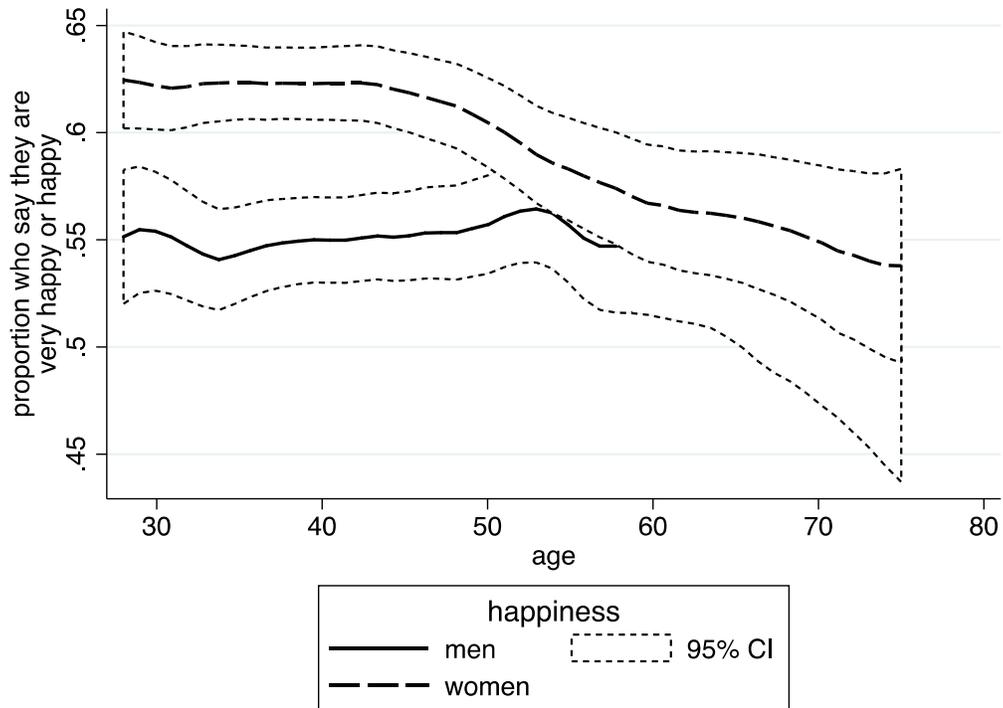


Figure 1. Local polynomial regression of reporting being “happy” or “very happy” by sex and age. Sample includes men and women ages 28 and older. See text for details. N=9,721.



Figure 2. Distribution of happiness by relationship to household head among married women aged 28-30. See text for details. N=2,183.

Appendix 1.

Results of Ordered Logit Regression of Happiness among married women aged 28-50 (excluding women who are wife to household heads or household head themselves and live with a parent-in-law)

Happiness (1 is "very unhappy", 5 is "very happy")			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Daughter in law of HH head	2.052*** (0.425)	1.482+ (0.311)	1.419 (0.324)
Household assets (ref= 0-4 assets)			
5 or 6 assets		1.355+ (0.216)	1.340+ (0.200)
7 or 8 assets		2.356*** (0.469)	2.323*** (0.446)
9 or 10 assets		3.266*** (0.686)	2.700*** (0.597)
More than 10 assets		5.922*** (1.721)	4.024*** (1.075)
Adivasi			0.653+ (0.149)
Muslim			0.620* (0.138)
Scheduled Caste			0.887 (0.150)
Age group (ref= 28-35)			
35-42			0.965 (0.156)
>42			0.963 (0.168)
Education (ref= no education)			
1-5 years			0.805 (0.169)
6-8 years			0.936 (0.166)
9-12 years			1.315 (0.405)
More than 12 years			1.589 (0.604)
Log expenditure			0.0766* (0.0847)
Log expenditure squared			1.236* (0.109)
Formal paid employment			1.109 (0.249)
N	1,873	1,873	1,873