

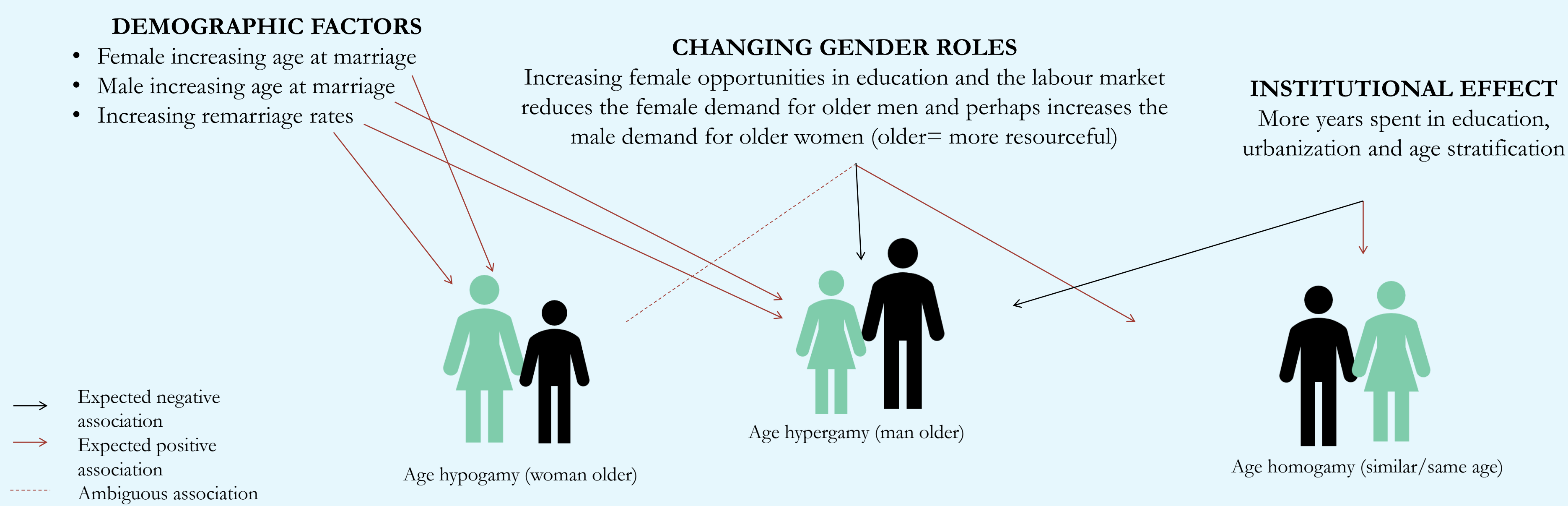
Older women, younger men, any new trend?

A study on age differences between spouses in Italy, 1870-2015

Giuliana Giuliani, European University Institute

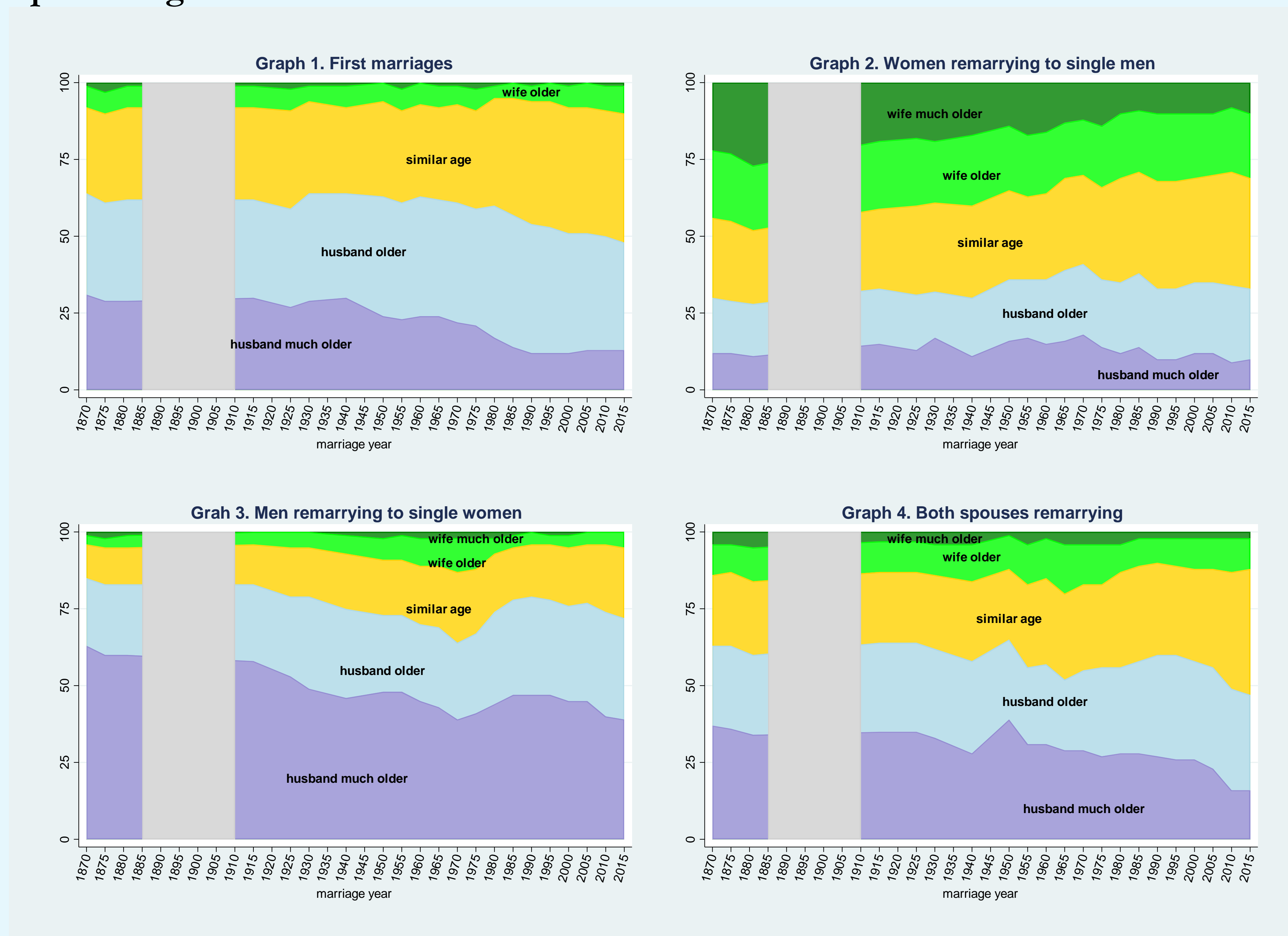
Background: Men are the eldest partners in the majority of couples. But theoretical and empirical observations suggest that the patterns of age differences may be changing in contemporary developed societies. Here, I analyse the patterns of age differences between spouses in Italy from 1870 to 2015.

FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT AGE ASSORTMENT



Results

Distribution of age differences among different types of marriages. Italy, 1870-2015. Spouses aged 15-49.



Previous findings:

- A trend towards smaller age differences and more couples with similar age among first marriages in the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, France, the US, Australia (Atkinson & Glass, 1985; Bozon, 1991; Gustafson & Fransson, 2015; Qu, 1997, 1997; Van de Putte et al., 2009; Van Poppel, Liefbroer, Vermunt, & Smeenk, 2001)
- A smaller positive trend towards more couples with older women from the seventies in Spain and Sweden (Kolk, 2015; Esteve, Cortina, & Cabré, 2009).

In this study, I contribute to the existing literature by examining the trends in a new country, Italy, taking a longer time perspective and including second order marriages to the evidences.

Data is based on cross-tabulation of grooms' and brides' age in 5 years age-categories, in selected marriage cohorts between 1870 and 2015.

Age differences are considered *smaller* (when spouses are one age category apart), *larger* (when they are two or more age categories apart) or *similar* (when spouses are within the same age category).

The graphs on the side includes only spouses under age 50.

Sources: Various online archives of the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), mainly civic status and marriage registers.

Note: Divorce was introduced in Italy in 1970. Remarrying spouses can be identified as mainly widows or widowers before this year and divorcees afterwards (graphs 2-4).

With respect to previous findings, the case of Italy shows that:

- As for other countries, overall marriages are more likely to be hypergamous or homogamous and only a minority of them are hypogamous (on average about 60%, 32% and 8% respectively).
- The **positive trend of homogamy is confirmed** in all types of marriages (graphs 1-4).
- The **negative trend of hypergamy is confirmed only concerning larger age differences**, but not smaller ones (graphs 1-4).
- In contrast to other studies, **the share of hypergamous marriages with smaller age differences increased slightly** in the second half of the 20th century (with the exception of graph 2).
- The **positive trend in hypogamous marriages cannot be confirmed**. Among first marriages, the share of hypogamous marriages in 2015 was very similar to that in 1870 (with an even smaller proportion of larger age differences in 2015, graph 1).
- On the contrary, there was a **negative trend of hypogamous marriages with larger age differences** particularly among second order marriages (graphs 1-4).
- There are important gender differences in the patterns of age assortment of remarrying women and men to single spouses. The vast majority of men remarrying to single brides are older than their spouses, and in about half of the cases there are larger differences (graph 3). About one third of marriages between remarrying women and single grooms are homogamous. The remaining part of them are very diverse but privilege smaller age differences (graph 2).

Conclusions

The case of Italy suggests that, at aggregated level:

- Age heterogamy did not increase with higher age at marriage;
- More egalitarian gender roles did not lead to an increase in age hypogamy;
- The positive trend of age homogamy is confirmed in all types of marriages. Whether this is due to more gender egalitarian roles or to "institutional effects" merits further investigation.

Essential references

- Atkinson, M. P., & Glass, B. L. (1985). Marital Age Heterogamy and Homogamy, 1900 to 1980. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 47(3)
- Bozon, M. (1991). Women and the Age Gap Between Spouses: An Accepted Domination? *Population: An English Selection*, 3
- Esteve, A., Cortina, C., & Cabré, A. (2009). Long Term Trends in Marital Age Homogamy Patterns: Spain, 1922-2006. *INED Population*.
- Esteve, A., Schwartz, C. R., van Bavel, J., Permanyer, I., Klesment, M., & García-Román, J. (2016). The End of Hypergamy: Global Trends and Implications. *Population and Development Review*, 42(4)
- Gustafson, P., & Fransson, U. (2015). Age Differences Between Spouses: Sociodemographic Variation and Selection. *Marriage & Family Review*, 51(7)
- Kolk, M. (2015). Age Differences in Unions: Continuity and Divergence Among Swedish Couples Between 1932 and 2007. *European Journal of Population*, 31(4)
- Oppenheimer, V. K. (1997). Women's Employment and the Gain to Marriage: The Specialization and Trading Model. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23(1)
- Presser, H. B. (1975). Age differences between spouses: Trends, patterns, and social implications. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 19(2)
- Qu, L. (1997). Age differences between brides and grooms in Australia. *Family Matters* (49).
- Van de Putte et al. (2009). The Rise of Age Homogamy in 19th Century Western Europe. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71(5)
- Van Poppel et al. (2010). Love, necessity and opportunity: Changing patterns of marital age. *Population studies* 55 (1)