



Who is older? Gender and age differences in heterosexual couples

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Ph.D. thesis defence on 14 October 2020

Abstract

Why are women the younger partner in the majority of couples? This thesis investigates the social and gendered patterns of age-difference between heterosexual partners in Europe and beyond, and the causes behind such patterns. Chapter 2 begins by constructing a theoretical framework to identify the mechanisms of mating selection that apply to age-differences, whether these may vary by gender, and why. In the following two chapters, the thesis investigates how age differences among married couples varies across space and time. In chapter 3, it analyses age differences between spouses in 96 countries, and how they vary according to the level of socio-economic development, women's empowerment and the demographic characteristics of the country. In chapter 4, it focuses on one case study, showing how age differences between spouses have changed in Italy over the past 145 years. Thereafter, the thesis moves on to cohabiting and married unions and tests two specific hypotheses affecting women's and men's preferences for age hypergamy. In chapter 5, it tests the "empowerment" hypothesis, according to which women with more opportunities are less likely to choose older men because such women can "afford" the risk of less financially stable men and less traditional gender roles. In chapter 6, the "evolutionary" hypothesis is tested, that is that men seek younger women as a reproductive strategy.

The thesis shows the persistence of hypergamy and its prevalence among marriages worldwide, but cross-country differences linked to different levels of women's empowerment. Importantly, the patterns of age differences among European cohabiting and married couples reflect gender differences in opportunities in the society and, only to a lesser extent, biological differences in reproduction capacity.

Jury: Fabrizio Bernardi (EUI), Clara Cortina (Universitat Pompeu Fabra), Juho Härkönen (EUI) Jan Van Bavel (KU Leuven)

Bio

In her research Giuliana Giuliani investigates social and gender inequality, from various angles. After writing her dissertation on gender and age differences in heterosexual couples, her next project will be investigating the effects of the lockdown on women in the UK. This project will be funded by the EUI. She is also a researcher at the University of Edinburgh, where she examines social inequalities in the creative economy. Before obtaining her PhD at the EUI, she studied Social Demography at Stockholm's University and Sociology at the University of Bologna. More info about Giuliana here: <https://me.eui.eu/giuliana-giuliani/>