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FP-15-14 Assortative Mating: Age Heterogamy in U.S. Marriages, 1964-2014

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Assortative Mating

Age Heterogamy in U.S. Marriages, 1964-2014



Esther Lamidi, Susan L. Brown, & Wendy D. Manning

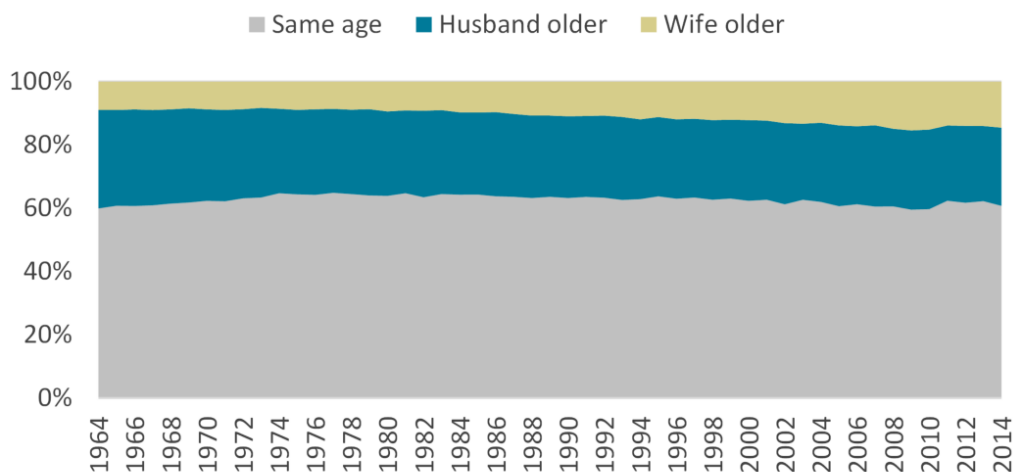
Couples tend to mate assortatively, selecting spouses who possess similar qualities. Spousal homogamy, marriage between a couple with similar demographic characteristics (i.e., age, education, race/ethnicity), is commonplace. Heterogamy, or disparity between spouses on these dimensions, is linked to lower relationship quality and marital stability (Booth & Edwards, 1992). This is the first installment of a new Family Profile Series examining trends in marital age, education, and racial-ethnic heterogamy using data on marriages from five decades of the Current Population Survey (1964-2014). Marriages are age heterogamous if they involve wives who are older than their husbands by two or more years (wife older) or husbands whose wives are five or more years younger than them (husband older).

Trends in Spousal Age Heterogamy

- In the past half century, two-fifths of all U.S. marriages were age heterogamous.
- The trends in marital age heterogamy in the U.S. show increasing convergence between the share of married couples with older husbands and the share of couples with older wives.
- The traditional age heterogamous couples (husbands older than wives) steadily declines from nearly one-third of all couples in 1964, to just one-quarter in 2014 (Figure 1).
- Conversely, there is a 67 percent increase in the share of American husbands who are married to older women.
- Fifteen percent of married couples have older wives in 2014 compared to just 9% in the 1960s.

het·er·og·a·my
(hēt'ə-rōg'ə-mē)
Marriage between people who are different from each other, especially in their sociocultural backgrounds.

Figure 1. Trends in Spousal Age Heterogamy in the U.S., 1964-2014



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1964-2014

References:

American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition. Copyright © 2011 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

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Education and Spousal Age Heterogamy

- Couples with college-educated wives are most often age homogamous.
- Spousal age heterogamy remains most prevalent among couples with less educated wives.
 - More wives who did not finish high school are married to younger men than are college-educated wives (Figure 2).
- The share of couples with older wives increased at all educational levels, but the increase was most pronounced among couples with wives who earned a high school diploma (Figure 2).
- Marriages to older husbands are more prevalent among women with less than a high school education than women with higher educational attainment (Figure 3).
- The percentage of couples with older husbands declines across educational levels between 1964 and 2014, but the greatest decline was among couples with wives who did not have a high school education (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Educational Variation in Spousal Age Heterogamy (Older Wives)

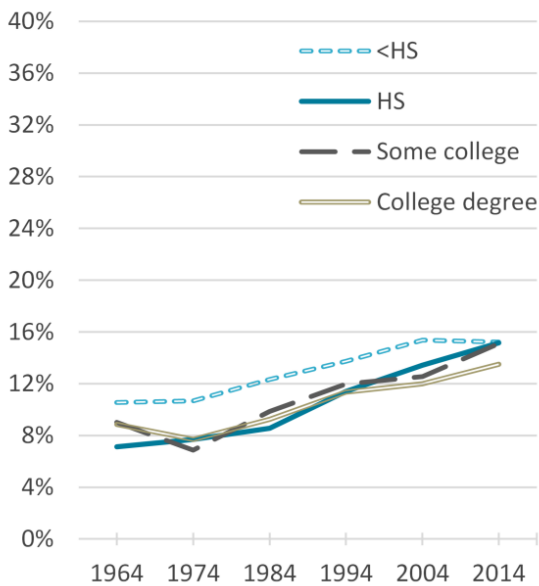
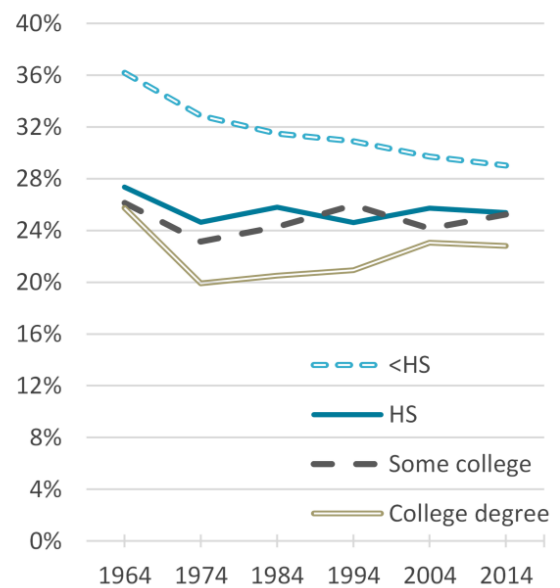


Figure 3. Educational Variation in Spousal Age Heterogamy (Older Husbands)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1964-2014

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