A study on the characteristics of spouses who intermarry in Italy

Uno studio delle caratteristiche dei matrimoni misti in Italia

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Abstract This contribution compares the characteristics of spouses in endogamous vs. exogamous marriages in Italy using marriage registers for 2017. We model the probability of observing an endogamous vs. exogamous marriage between a native and foreign spouse coming from different migrant origins. The marriage patterns that we find are consistent with a (mismatched) marriage market where men and women's expectations are changing at different rhythms.

Abstract *Questo contributo confronta le caratteristiche degli sposi nei matrimoni endogami e in quelli esogami osservati in Italia nel 2017. Studiamo la probabilità di osservare un matrimonio endogamo rispetto ad uno esogamo tra uno sposo/a italiano/a e una sposa/o straniera/o con diverse origini migratorie. Emergono dei modelli matrimoniali coerenti con un mercato matrimoniale squilibrato in cui le aspettative di uomini e donne cambiano in modo differente.*

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Key words: Intermarriage, Marriage, homogamy, assortative mating, marriage market

1 Background and Hypothesis

The abundance of high-educated women and the scarcity of high-educated men may create mismatches in the marriage market (Grow and Van Bavel, 2015). In the Italian context, where the male breadwinner family type is persistent, the emergence of a reversal of the gender gap in education contrasts sharply with a still prevailing gendered ideology permeating family life. Contrary to what found for other settings, in Southern Europe high-educated women have the lowest likelihood of being in a union (Kalmijn, 2013) and, together with low-educated men, are most exposed to the risk of lifelong singlehood (Bellani et al., 2017).

The growing migrant population may improve the marriageability of those groups whose marriage opportunities are being shrunk, i.e. high-educated women and low-educated men (Van Bavel, 2012). Low-educated men and high-educated women, we argue, will be more likely to intermarry (vs. marrying a native spouse) if compared to better-educated men and lower-educated women, respectively. Indeed, if the preference for homogamy cannot be satisfied in the national marriage market (e.g. there are too few low-educated women and too few high-educated men), native spouses may be willing to marry out of their group in exchange of a certain attribute viewed as a 'compensating differential' (Grossbard-Shechtman and Fu, 2002). We distinguish between different migrant groups so to account for differences in their cultural and economic characteristics. Following Medrano et al. (2014), we consider spouses coming from Western Europe, North America and Oceania as having a prevailing gender-egalitarian ideology, while we consider spouses coming from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America as having a prevailing traditional gender ideology.

We expect low-educated native men to be willing to marry foreign wives from traditional contexts, in exchange of their traditional gender ideology, while we expect high-educated native women to be willing to marry foreign husbands from gender-egalitarian contexts.

2 Data and Methods

We study the population of Italian men and women who married for the first time in 2017, using marriage register data (Rilevazione dei Matrimoni, ISTAT).

We are interested in comparing the characteristics of spouses in exogamous marriages with those in endogamous marriages. To do so, using a multinomial logistic regression model, we model the probability that a native man or woman with

certain socio-demographic characteristics will marry a native vs. a foreign spouse from a given country of origin. Our variable of interest is constituted of seven categories: a native woman (man) marrying a native spouse (ref.), or intermarrying with a spouse from North America and Oceania, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, or Latin America. As independent variables we consider: age of the native spouse (linear and quadratic term); age difference between native and foreign spouse (same age –ref.–, native spouse is older, and younger); education of the native spouse (low, medium, high), educational difference between native and foreign spouse (same education –ref.–, native spouse is more educated and native spouse is less educated), employment status of the couple (both employed, jobless, only man employed, only woman employed) and order of marriage of the foreign spouse (first –ref.–, second or higher order). We run separate models by gender of the native spouse.

3 Results

In this section we identify the profiles of native spouses who intermarry. Such profiles differ between men and women and vary with the origin of the foreign spouse.

About one third of Italian women intermarry with Western-European husbands, whereas about half of Italian men intermarry with Eastern-European wives (Table 1). Results of the multinomial regression show that native men and women who marry spouses coming from areas characterized by a gender-egalitarian ideology tend to be highly educated, whereas those who marry spouses coming from areas characterized by a traditional gender-egalitarian ideology tend to be low educated (Tables 2 and 3). The educational differential among spouses also matters: whereby marriages among natives are associated with homogamy, intermarriage is associated with hypergamy when native men marry wives from traditional areas and with hypogamy when they marry wives from gender-egalitarian areas. Men who intermarry tend to be older than men who marry a native wife. Native women who intermarry with husbands from gender-egalitarian areas are more likely to intermarry with a spouse who has achieved at least the same educational level as they did, and tend to be older than women who married a native husband. As for low-educated men, high-educated women might have spent some time searching for a similarly high-educated spouse before turning to foreign spouses. Instead, native women who intermarry with husbands from traditional areas tend to be less educated and younger than women

who marry a native husband. Here, the gradient in the educational gap between spouses is less clear, except for a departure from homogamy.

Table 1: Intermarriages by gender of the native spouse and origin of the foreign spouse. First marriages of Italian husbands, 2017

Origin of foreign spouse	Italian Husband	Italian Wife
Traditional:		
Latin America	15.47	9.90
Eastern Europe	47.3	28.7
Africa	8.6	20.0
Asia	6.6	6.4
Gender egalitarian:		
Western Europe	19.1	30.7
North America and Oceania	2.9	4.3
Total N.	19,865	12,574

Table 2: Relative Risk Ratios from multinomial logistic regression model on the probability of marrying a wife of a given origin for Italian native men who married for the first time in 2017

	Native Italian husband at first marriage			
	RRR	Std. Err.	RRR	Std. Err.
	Western Europe		*North America, Oceania*	
Age of husband	1.111 ***	0.024	0.947	0.039
Age of husband^2	0.999 **	0.000	1.001	0.000
Order of marriage of wife (First ref.)				
Second or higher order	0.683 **	0.097	1.659	0.434
Husband education (Primary ref.)				
Tertiary edu.	2.446 ***	0.239	2.962 ***	0.598
Secondary edu.	1.064	0.094	1.461 **	0.259
Age difference (Same Age ref.)				
Husband older	0.899	0.075	1.129	0.186
Wife older	1.485 ***	0.157	1.369	0.289
Educational Homogamy (Equally ref.)				
Husband more educated	0.607 ***	0.081	0.281 **	0.103
Wife more educated	1.344 **	0.123	1.415	0.251
	Eastern Europe		*Africa*	
Age of husband	1.066 ***	0.008	1.008	0.019
Age of husband^2	1.000 ***	0.000	1.000	0.000
Order of marriage of wife (First ref.)				
Second or higher order	2.933 ***	0.110	2.005 ***	0.223
Husband education (Primary ref.)				
Tertiary edu.	0.807 ***	0.032	0.428 ***	0.049
Secondary edu.	0.849 ***	0.025	0.530 ***	0.044
Age difference (Same Age ref.)				
Husband older	1.970 ***	0.072	2.372 ***	0.260
Wife older	1.114 **	0.058	1.676 ***	0.239
Educational Homogamy (Equally ref.)				
Husband more educated	1.335 ***	0.060	2.329 ***	0.263
Wife more educated	1.239 ***	0.039	0.784 **	0.075
	Asia		*Latina America*	
Age of husband	1.060 **	0.022	1.036 **	0.012
Age of husband^2	1.000	0.000	1.000	0.000
Order of marriage of wife (First ref.)				
Second or higher order	1.964 ***	0.209	1.840 ***	0.119
Husband education (Primary ref.)				
Tertiary edu.	1.502 ***	0.150	0.766 ***	0.049
Secondary edu.	1.142	0.095	0.880 **	0.042
Age difference (Same Age ref.)				
Husband older	1.679 ***	0.158	1.646 ***	0.095
Wife older	1.912 ***	0.221	1.894 ***	0.135
Educational Homogamy (Equally ref.)				
Husband more educated	1.060	0.120	1.501 ***	0.102
Wife more educated	1.119	0.099	1.022	0.054

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Table 3: Relative Risk Ratios from multinomial logistic regression model on the probability of marrying a husband of a given origin for Italian native women who married for the first time in 2017

	Native Italian wife at first marriage		
	RRR		Std. Err.	RRR		Std. Err.

	RRR		Std. Err.	RRR		Std. Err.
	Western Europe			*North America, Oceania*		
Age of wife	1.100	**	0.032	0.835	***	0.039
Age of wife^2	0.999	**	0.000	1.002	**	0.001
Order of marriage of housband (First ref.)						
Second or higher order	1.057		0.150	3.124	***	0.859
Wife education (Primary ref.)						
Tertiary edu.	2.778	***	0.288	2.841	***	0.678
Secondary edu.	1.128		0.115	1.555	**	0.349
Age difference (Same Age ref.)						
Husband older	0.918		0.076	0.591	**	0.105
Wife older	1.773	***	0.182	1.910	**	0.425
Educational Homogamy (Equally ref.)						
Husband more educated	1.336	**	0.173	1.221		0.357
Wife more educated	0.436	***	0.045	0.543	**	0.115
	Eastern Europe			*Africa*		
Age of wife	0.695	***	0.012	0.736	***	0.010
Age of wife^2	1.004	***	0.000	1.003	***	0.000
Order of marriage of housband (First ref.)						
Second or higher order	1.571	**	0.254	1.705	***	0.201
Wife education (Primary ref.)						
Tertiary edu.	0.786	**	0.075	0.484	***	0.041
Secondary edu.	0.757	***	0.058	0.603	***	0.038
Age difference (Same Age ref.)						
Husband older	0.697	***	0.053	1.104		0.081
Wife older	3.759	***	0.342	6.017	***	0.495
Educational Homogamy (Equally ref.)						
Husband more educated	1.339	**	0.138	1.281	**	0.108
Wife more educated	1.385	***	0.112	1.395	***	0.102
	Asia			*Latina America*		
Age of wife	0.736	***	0.021	0.764	***	0.016
Age of wife^2	1.003	***	0.000	1.003	***	0.000
Order of marriage of housband (First ref.)						
Second or higher order	1.643		0.431	2.264	***	0.370
Wife education (Primary ref.)						
Tertiary edu.	1.070		0.182	1.249		0.149
Secondary edu.	0.896		0.128	0.899		0.092
Age difference (Same Age ref.)						
Husband older	0.807		0.117	0.866		0.090
Wife older	4.295	***	0.707	4.375	***	0.515
Educational Homogamy (Equally ref.)						
Husband more educated	1.366		0.258	1.604	***	0.207
Wife more educated	0.988		0.151	0.922		0.100

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Our initial hypotheses are therefore confirmed: for men, the probability of marrying a wife from traditional areas vs. a native wife increases as his educational attainment decreases; for women, the probability of marrying a husband from gender-egalitarian areas vs. a native husband increases as her educational attainment increases. This contribution confirms results in Gabrielli and Paterno (2016) and Maffioli, Paterno and Gabrielli (2014) on different data sources and extends their findings highlighting the heterogeneous patterns that exist across different migrant origins. Furthermore, the perspective we propose in this contribution shows that intermarriage not only can be used, as traditionally done, as an indicator of integration of migrants, but can also shed light on the marriage patterns of the native population.

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