

# Do Counter-stereotypical Female Role Models Impact Women's Occupational Choices?

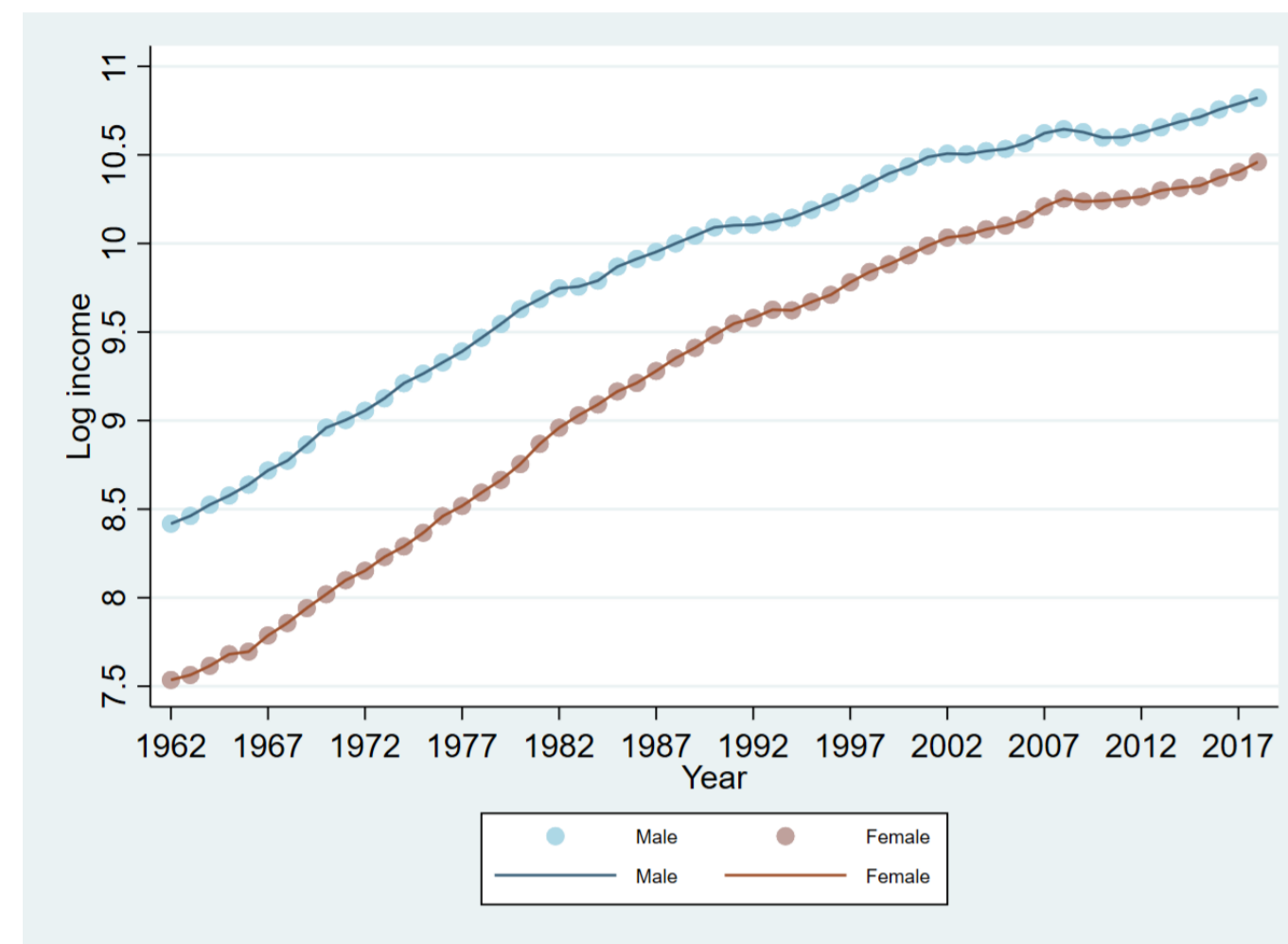
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“Young girls need to see role models in whatever careers they may choose, just so they can picture themselves doing those jobs someday. You can't be what you can't see”

Sally Ride, 2012, Harvard Business Review

## Motivation-Gender gap and female role models



Despite “grand convergence”, women are still underrepresented in lucrative and competitive professions, such as STEM, business, and finance, which in turn perpetuates the gender pay gap.

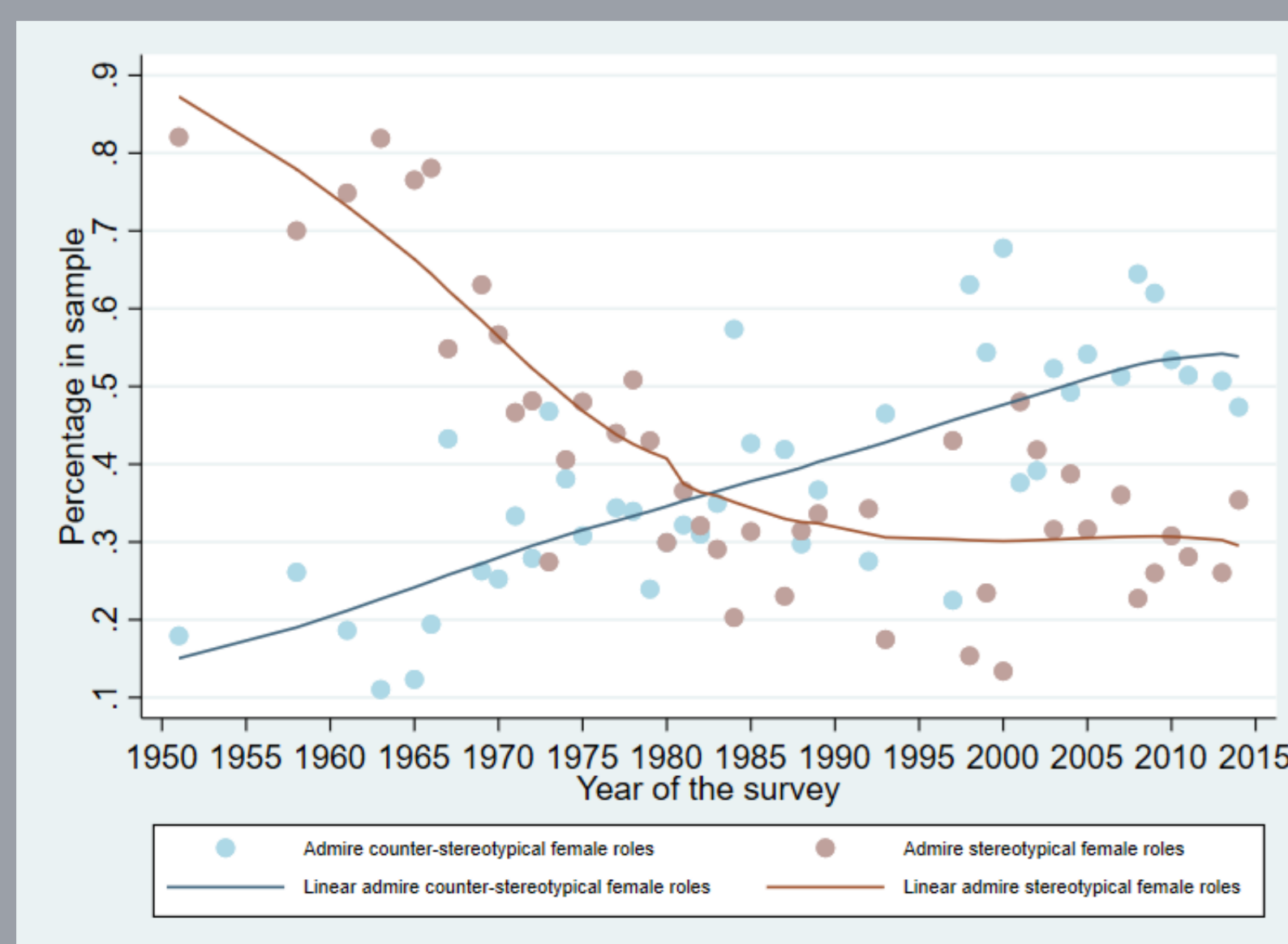
- Identity framework ([1], [2]): people fit themselves into different social categories according to what they think society expects from them.
- Female role models influence women's choices (e.g., [3], [4]).

## Main results in Nutshell

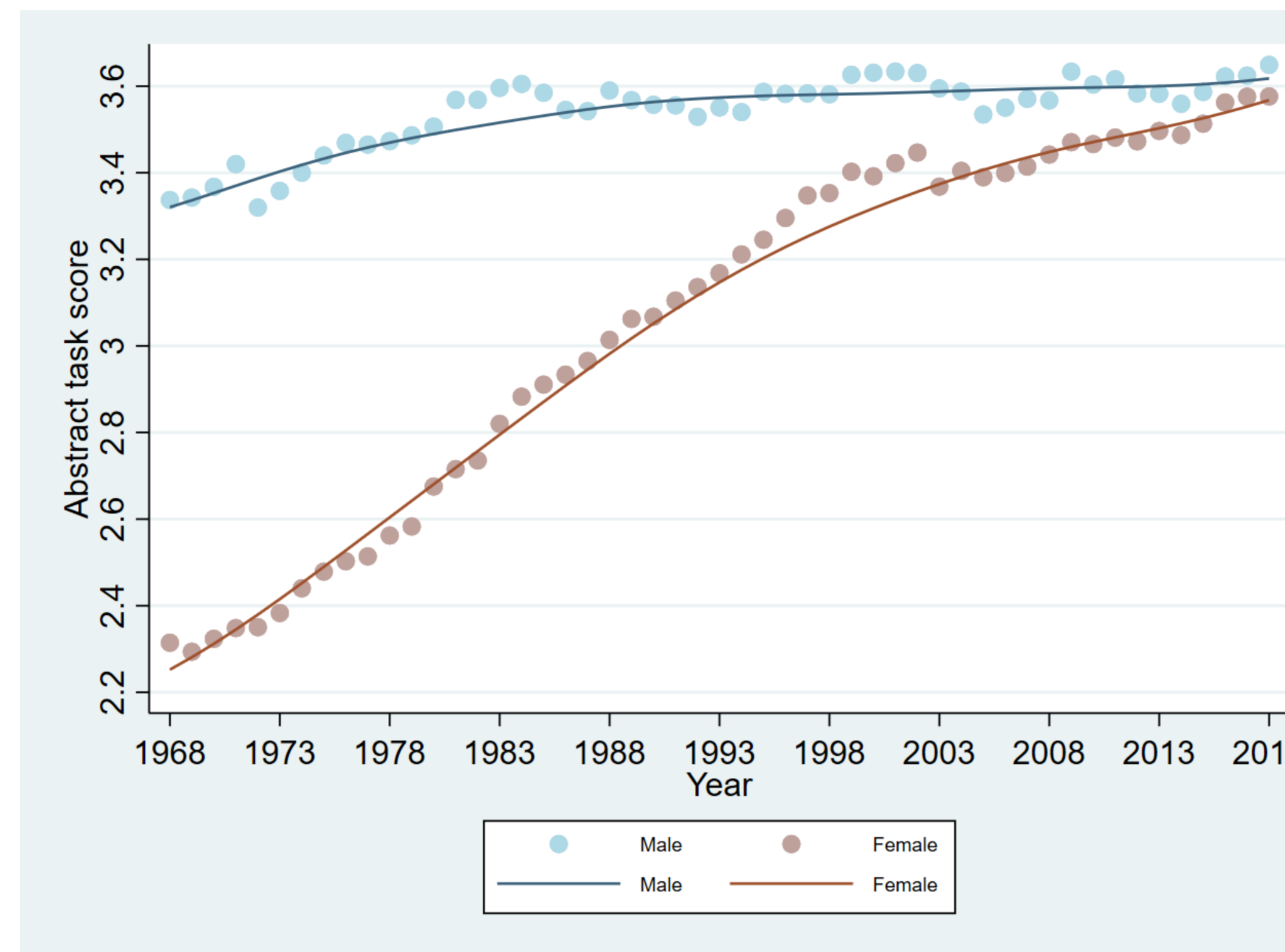
- Using a long time series of Gallup surveys from 1951 to 2014, we create a measure of counter-stereotypical female role models based on the fraction of local survey respondents who admire famous women in business, politics, or science.
- We show that women exposed to counter-stereotypical female role models make different occupational choices than women exposed to stereotypical female role models like housewives or mothers.
- The presence of counter-stereotypical female role models is associated with more women in full-time employment and with more women working in male-dominated industries and advanced occupations like managerial positions.

## Measuring female role models

- Gallup surveys from 1951 to 2014: “What woman do you admire the MOST?”
- Counter-stereotypical female role models: politicians, writers, journalists, businesswomen, astronauts, or activists

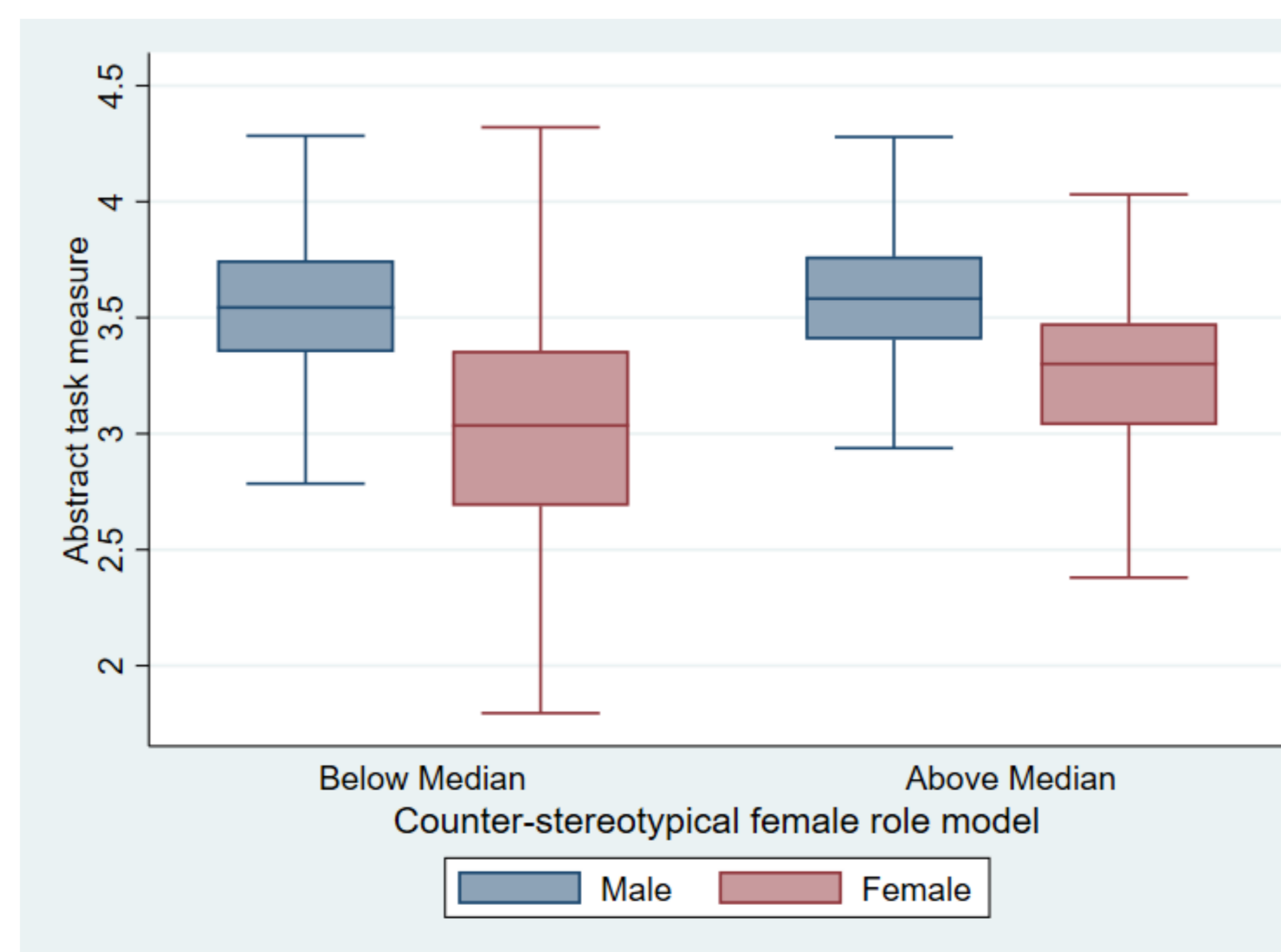


## Occupation characteristics by gender over time



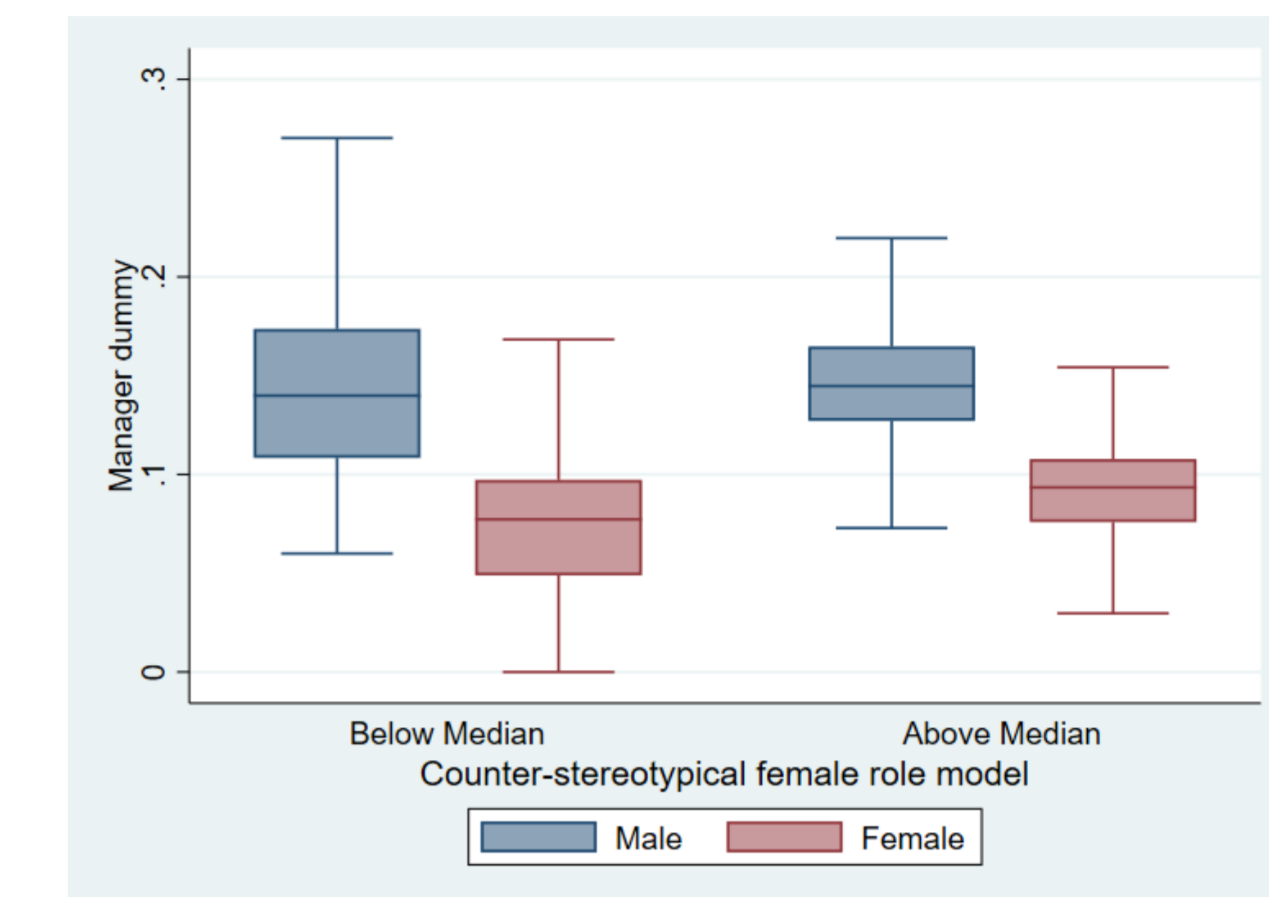
- Abstract task score adapted from [5], ranges from 1 to 10
- Abstract tasks: creative, problem-solving, and coordination tasks performed by highly-educated workers, e.g., finance and technology
- The gender gap in taking abstract occupations decreases over time - the decrease mainly comes from the significant increase in women joining abstract occupations

## Gender gap in occupation characteristics and female role models



- Women are more likely to take abstract occupations when admiring counter-stereotypical female role models
- Regression estimation: counter-stereotypical female role model decreases the gender gap of abstract task scores by 73%

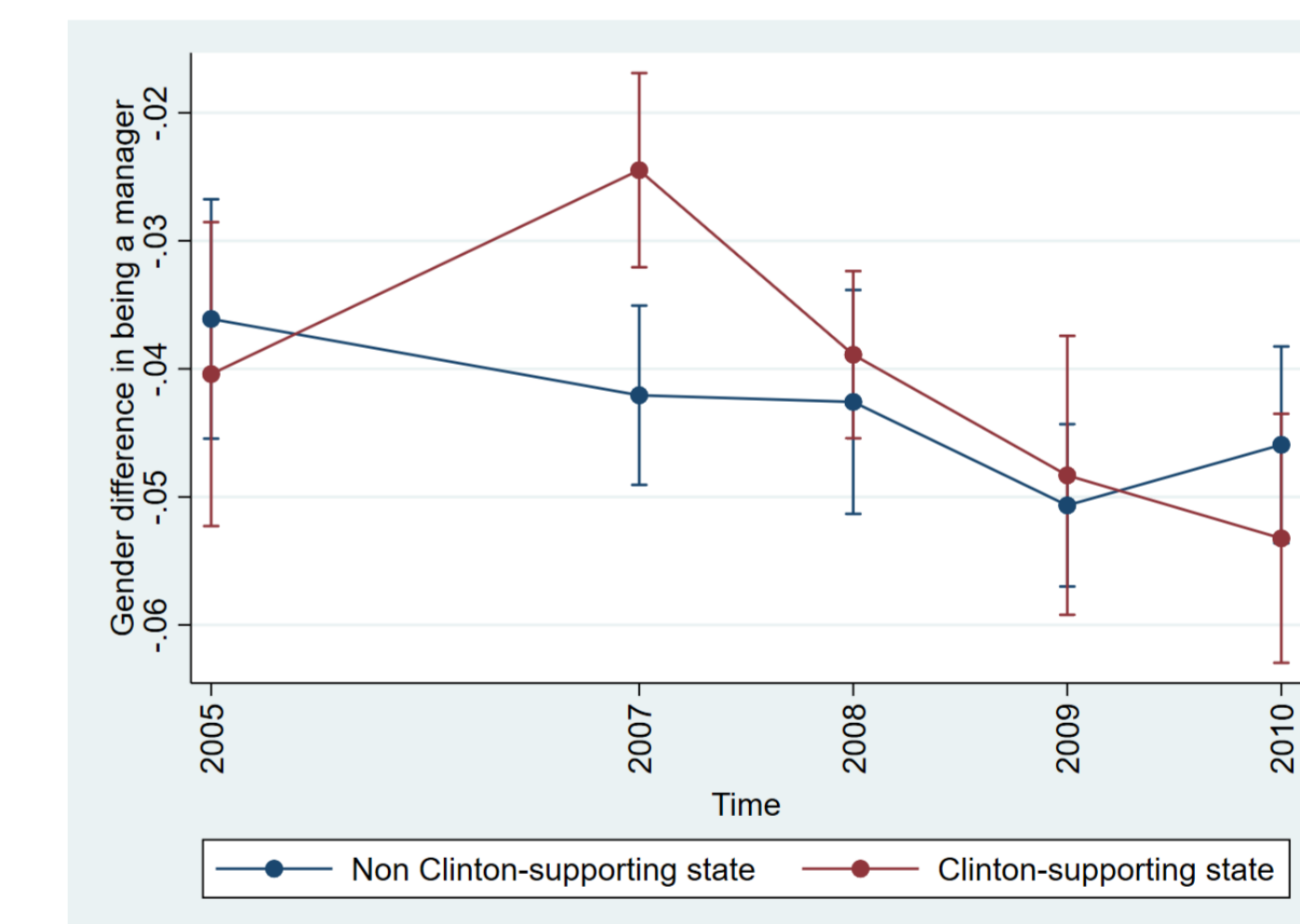
## Gender gap in managerial positions and female role models



- Women are more likely to take on managerial positions when admiring counter-stereotypical female role models
- Regression estimation: counter-stereotypical female role model decreases the gender gap in managerial positions by 62%

## Causality - Hillary Clinton's presidential primary run

- The negative shock to counter-stereotypical female role models in Clinton supporting states after Clinton lost the presidential primary in 2008 -> lower likelihood of women to work in managerial positions after 2007



## Contribution

- Create a systematic measure of counter-stereotypical female role models based on a long time series of public opinion surveys and study its impact on occupational choices and labor market outcomes for women in the US
- Contribute to literature on role models and female choices (e.g., [3] and [4])
- Practical implications: promoting counter-stereotypical female role models helps alleviate the gender gap in occupational choices

## References

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