



# Understanding the Landscape of Psychological Age at Work: Longitudinal Patterns of Change Among Women and Men in Different Age Groups

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## Abstract

Studies of aging and work suggest that psychological aspects of age, such as Felt Age (FA), may have more value than chronological age (CA) for understanding aging as it relates to work well-being and other work phenomena. The primary goal of this study is to continue building our understanding of the landscape of psychological age at work by focusing on within-person patterns of change in FA over time, particularly with respect to the magnitude and direction of discrepancies between FA and CA. Individual differences in the rate of change were examined, as well as those based on gender and age grouped by decade.

A sample of 403 workers (28% female, mean CA at Time 1 = 48 years) from six mid-sized manufacturing organizations in the USA participated in a longitudinal study of aging and work capacity. Felt age (as well as indicators of work well-being, work functioning, and personal health) was assessed at three points in time, with an interval of approximately one year between assessments. Several key findings emerged from longitudinal analyses of change in FA over time. Notably, the rate of change in FA during the three year period differed among age groups, with the magnitude of change peaking among those with CA between 45-54 years. After controlling for gender differences in CA, we also observed gender differences in the magnitude of discrepancies between FA and CA and in the magnitude of change in FA over the three year period, with women exhibiting larger (and more variable) changes than men. Additional analyses focused on describing differential patterns of "swing" from negative to positive discrepancies between FA and CA.

## Background

- Work is an arena where aging processes have the potential to be reflected in a variety of outcomes that matter to workers and employers alike.
- Studies of aging and work phenomena suggest that chronological age is of limited utility as an indicator of work well-being or as a predictor of work performance.
- Other aspects of age, such as age self-construals, appear to have more value than chronological age for understanding work and aging.
- One feature of subjective age is known as Felt Age (FA), which refers to how old one "feels."
- Discrepancies between Felt Age and Chronological Age (i.e. feeling "younger than" or "older than" one's CA) have been observed in a variety of cross-sectional studies.
- Both FA and discrepancies between FA and CA have been linked to several personal (e.g. health), demographic (e.g. CA) and contextual (e.g. work demands) antecedents as well as a number of potential consequences (e.g. planned retirement age) of concern to organizations and employees.
- Previous work on FA and FA-CA discrepancies has been primarily cross-sectional in nature with little direct attention to issues of stability and change over time.

## Goals

Our primary objectives were to:

- Examine the *direction* and *magnitude* of changes in Felt Age over the course of two years, with Chronological Age serving as a reference point
- Examine patterns and rates of intra-individual change in the direction and magnitude of discrepancies between FA and CA
- Describe demographic between-group differences in the nature of changes in FA and FA-CA discrepancies, using Age Decade and Gender as initial demographic grouping variables

## Method

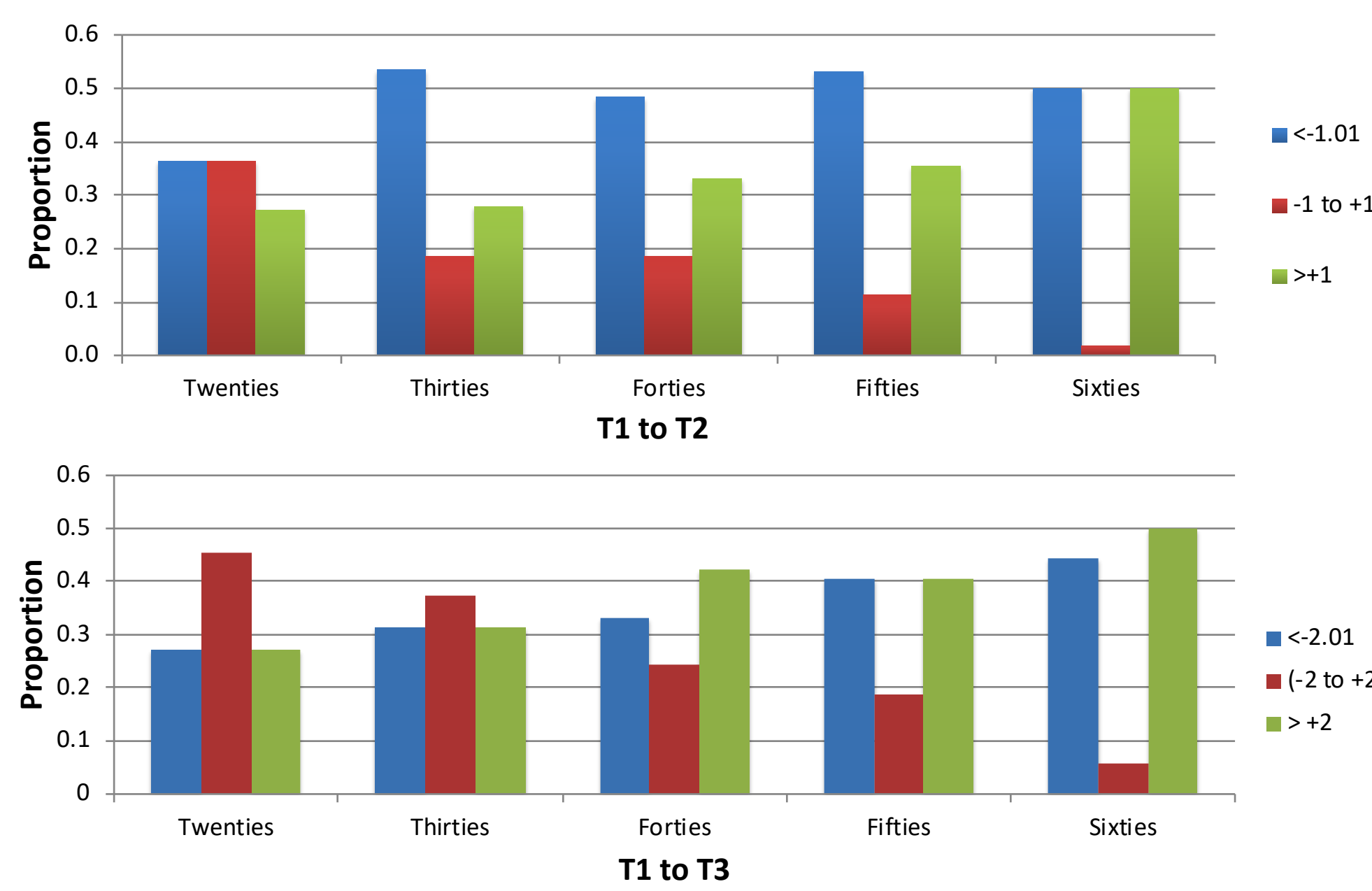
- Sample
  - 498 front line workers from six manufacturing organizations in the Northeast US that were participating in a longitudinal study, surveyed 3 times at 1 yr intervals
  - 70.1% Male and 29.9% Female, 84.7% White
  - Age at T1: Min = 21.3 yrs, Mean = 47.7 yrs, Max 70.7 yrs
  - 20's - 7%, 30's - 17%, 40's - 30%, 50's - 35%, 60's and older - 11%
  - Tenure: Mean = 15.4 yrs, SD = 11.9 yrs
  - Education: 53.7% HS graduate or some college, 30.5% college graduate (2/4 yr degree)
- Measures
  - Felt Age (FA): How old do you feel?
  - Chronological Age (CA): computed from birthdate
  - Discrepancies between FA and CA: FA - CA
    - + (>0) feel older than CA
    - (<0) feel younger than CA
- Grouping variables:
  - Decade (20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s)
  - Gender (male/female)

## Overview of Results and Future Directions

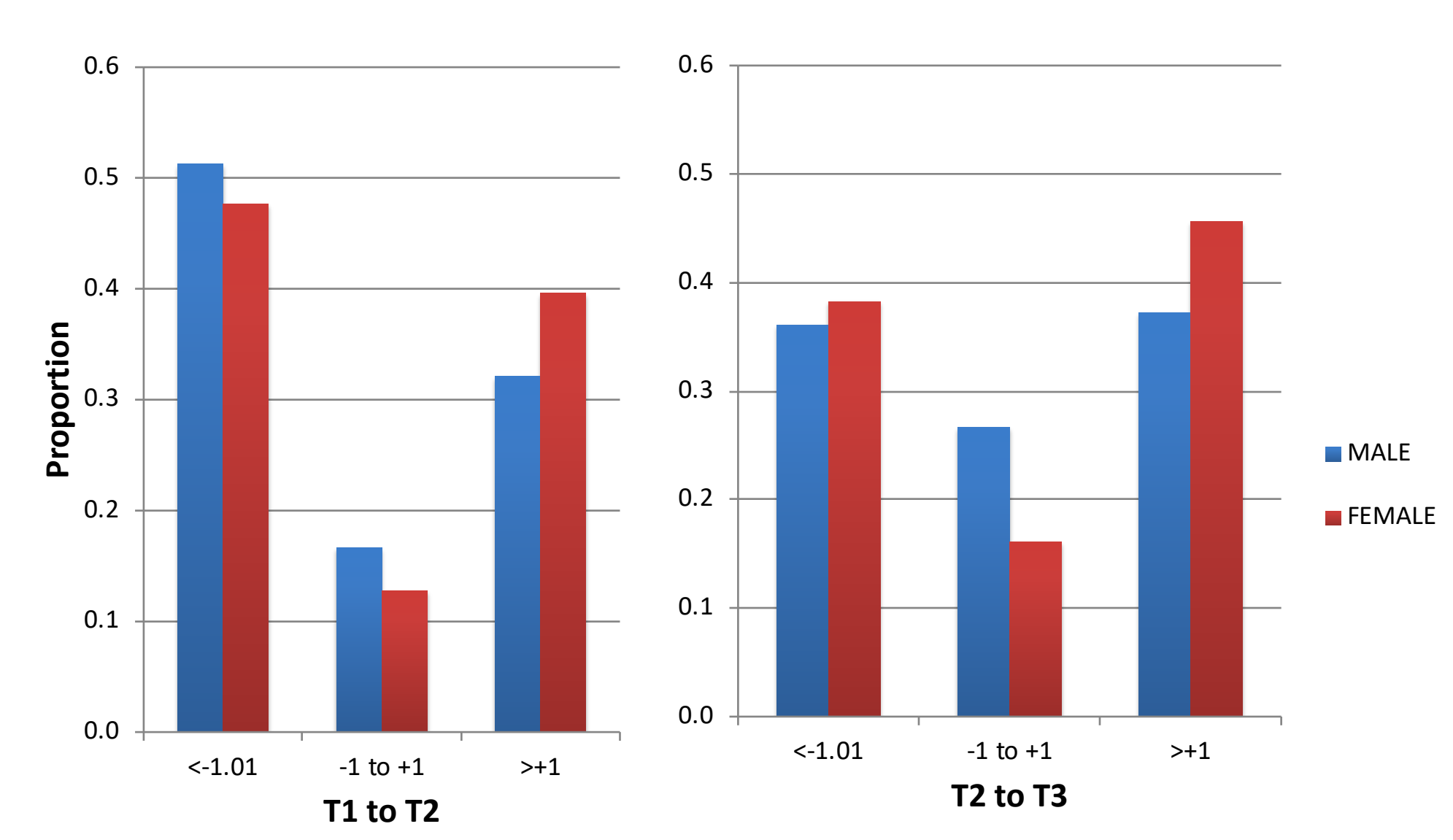
- Distributions of FA and FA-CA discrepancies were plotted for T1, T2, and T3. Individual regression lines regressing FA and FA-CA on time were likewise plotted.
- HLM analysis of slopes and intercepts were used to examine patterns of change for evidence of systematic between group differences in rates of change in FA over the two-year span of the study.
- Notably, the rate of change in FA during the three year period differed among age groups, with the magnitude of change peaking among those with CA between 45-54 years.
- After controlling for gender differences in CA, we also observed gender differences in the magnitude of discrepancies between FA and CA and in the magnitude of change in FA over the three year period, with women exhibiting larger (and more variable) changes than men.
- Additional analyses focused on describing differential patterns of "swing" from negative to positive discrepancies between FA and CA.
- Analyses currently underway examine work demands, work conditions, non-work conditions, and health as drivers of felt age and FA-CA discrepancies. Prior work and theorizing suggest that drivers will differ in importance across decades. These analyses will allow us to test those hypotheses in a more appropriate prospective fashion.

## Results

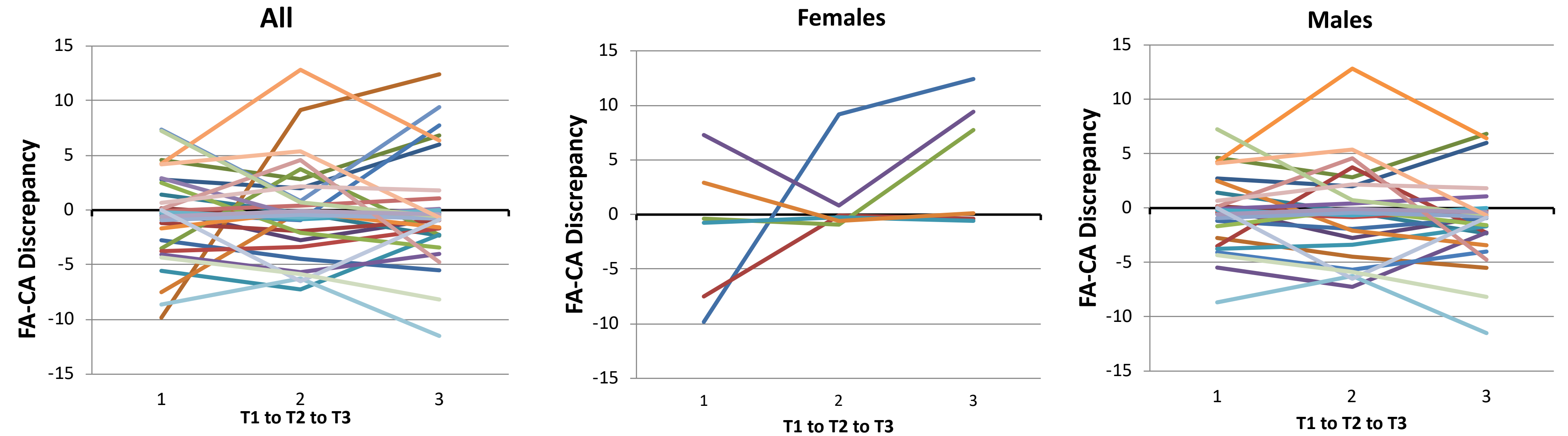
### Direction of changes in FA: By Decade



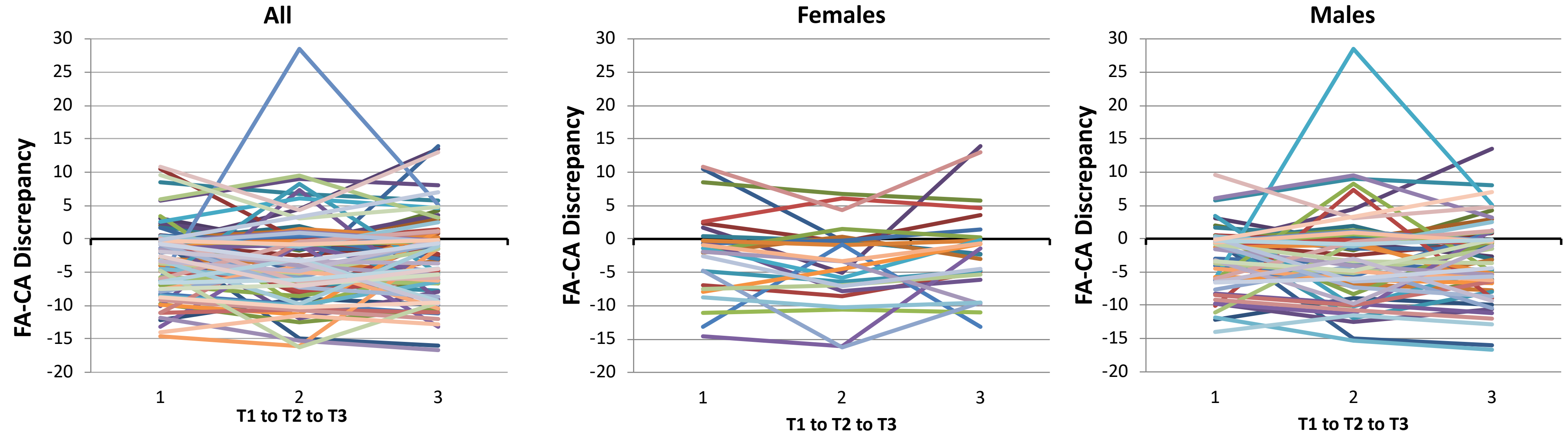
### Direction of changes in FA: By Gender



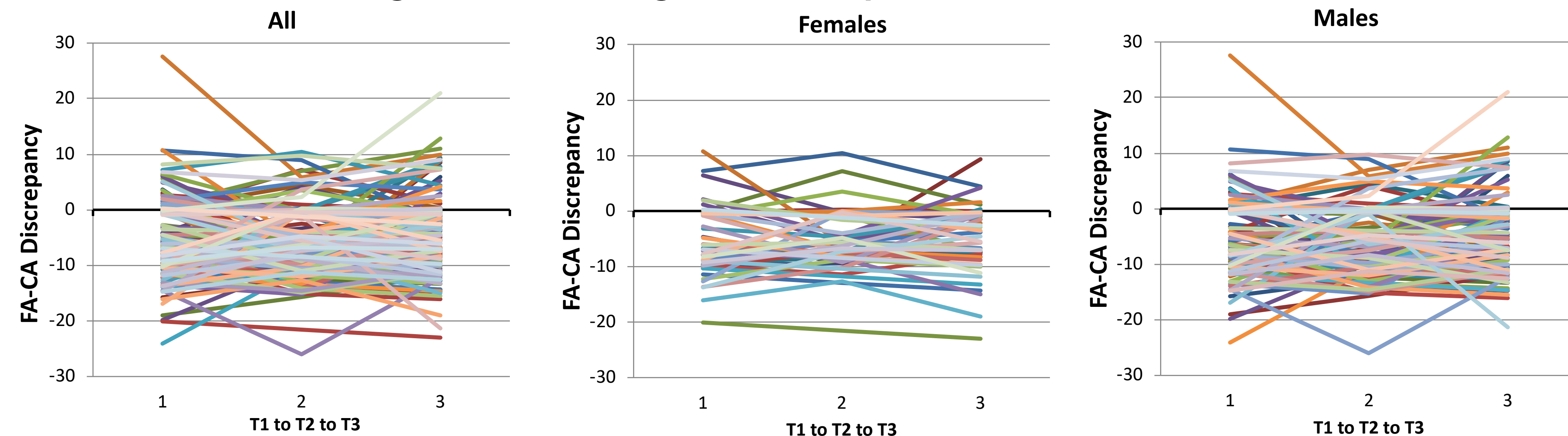
### Magnitude of Change for Participants with T1 CA 20-29



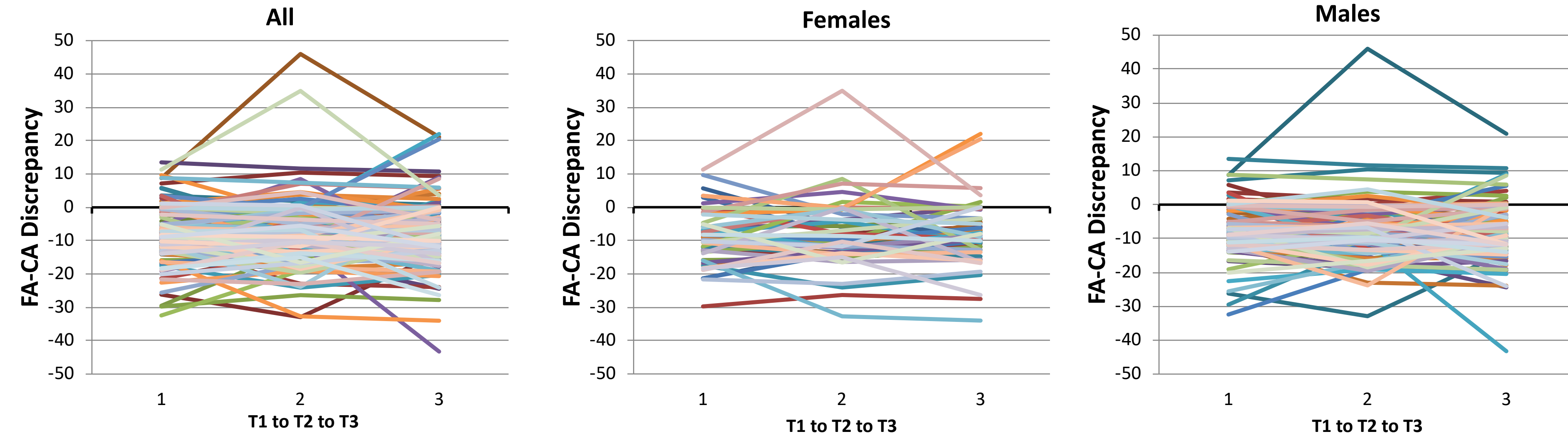
### Magnitude of Change for Participants with T1 CA 30-39



### Magnitude of Change for Participants with T1 CA 40-49



### Magnitude of Change for Participants with T1 CA 50-59



### Magnitude of Change for Participants with T1 CA 60-69

