

Assortative Mating

Educational Homogamy in U.S. Marriages, 1964-2014



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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 second 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 educationally heterogamous if one spouse attained a higher or lower level of education (less than high school, high school, some college, and college degree) than the other spouse.

Trends in Spousal Educational Homogamy

- The share of marriages involving husbands and wives with the same level of education slightly declined from 60% in 1964 to 56% in 2014.
 - In 2014, more than half of U.S. marriages were educationally homogamous, 23% had more educated wives and 20% had more educated husbands.
- The proportion of marriages in which husbands attained higher levels of education than wives increases throughout the late 1960s and 70s, peaking in 1979 at 27%. Since 1979, the share of marriages with higher educated husbands drops nearly 25% to one in five marriages.
- In contrast, the share of marriages involving more educated wives has been steadily increasing since the late 1980s. In 2007, the proportion of marriages with better educated wives surpassed the proportion with better educated husbands. By 2014, 23% of marriages involve wives with higher levels of education than their husbands compared to 20% with higher educated husbands.

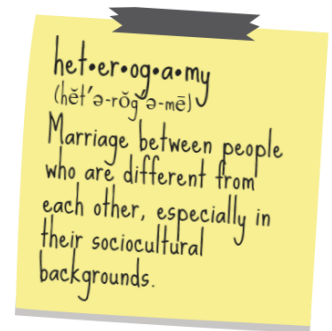
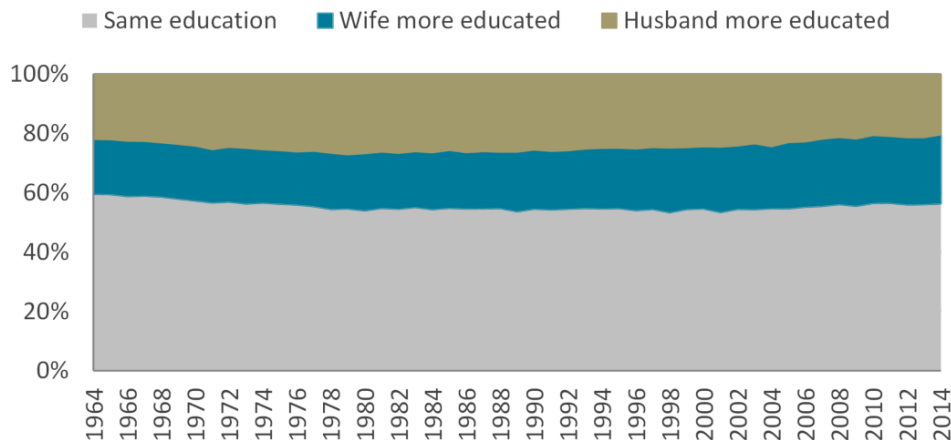


Figure 1. Trends in Spousal Education Homogamy in the U.S., 1964-2014



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

References:

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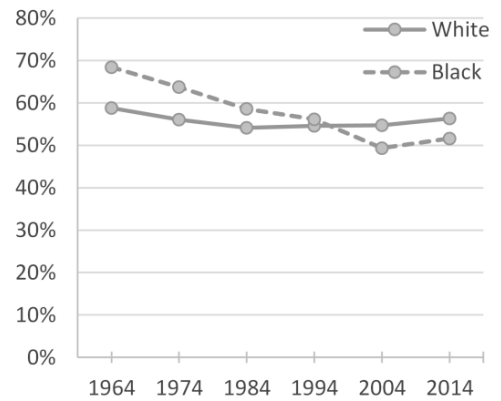
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Racial Variation in Educational Homogamy

- The fifty year decline of homogamous marriages is evident among White and Black married couples, but it is more pronounced among Blacks. Since 1964, White homogamous marriages declined 4.3% and Black homogamous marriages declined 25%.
- Fifty years ago, more Black marriages (68%) than White marriages (59%) involved couples with similar levels of education.
- Since 1997, the share of educationally homogamous marriages among Whites has exceeded the share among Blacks. By 2014, 56% of White marriages were educationally homogamous compared with 52% of Black marriages.

Figure 2. Racial Variation in Educational Homogamy

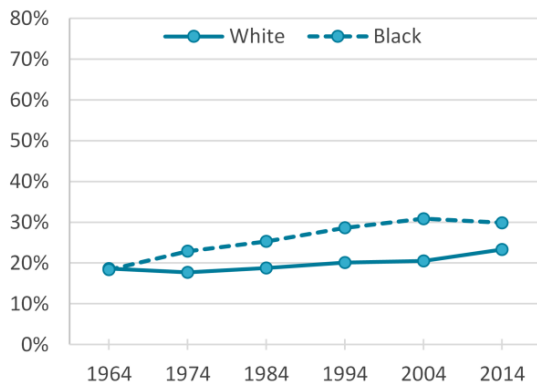


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1964-2014

Racial Variation in Educational Heterogamy

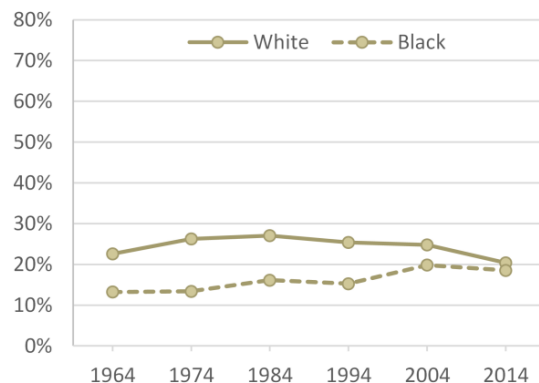
- The five decade increase in educational heterogamy in Black marriages reflects a 63% increase in the share of Black marriages with more educated wives (Figure 3) and a 40% increase in the share of Black marriages with more educated husbands (Figure 4).
- Among Whites, the increase in heterogamy is entirely due to an increasing share of marriages with higher educated wives, from 19% in 1964 to 23% in 2014. There was a 10% decline in the share of White marriages with more educated husbands over the same time period.
- Black women are more likely to be in a marriage where they have the educational advantage over their husbands compared to White women. Conversely, White men are more likely than Black men to have an educational advantage within their marriages.

Figure 3. Racial Variation in Educational Heterogamy (Wives More Educated)



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

Figure 4. Racial Variation in Education Heterogamy (Husbands More Educated)



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