

# What can movie stars tell us about marriage? That education matters, study finds

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Movie stars: Is there anything they can't tell us?

According to a study published in the Spring issue of the *Journal of Human Capital*, marriages among movie stars can help unravel the reasons why people tend to marry partners of similar education levels.

Social scientists have known for years that married people tend to be sorted by their levels of education, but the reasons for it have been elusive. It could be all about money. People may assume that a partner with similar education will have a salary that matches theirs. Or it could have to do with [lifestyle factors](#). Similar education may lead to similar interests in books, music, and hobbies.

On the other hand, [sociologists](#) might argue that sorting by education has less to do with personal preference and more to do with who we're likely to meet. People often meet their future spouses in college or grad school. Also, people of similar educational backgrounds tend to end up side-by-side in the workforce, leading to ample opportunities to strike up romance.

Movie star marriages can help sort all this out, according to Gustaf Bruze, an economist at the Aarhus School of Business and Social Sciences in Denmark.

Bruze assembled a large data set of top movie stars' marriages, earnings, and education levels. He found that level of formal education has no

correlation with a movie star's success, either in terms of box office earnings or the likelihood of winning an Oscar. Yet despite the disconnect between education and success, movie stars who marry each other still tend to have similar educational backgrounds, Bruze's analysis shows. His data also show that actors are unlikely to meet their spouses in school, or be cast together in movies due to their [education level](#).

The findings suggest that sorting on education isn't all about the money or solely an artifact of professional affiliations. "What it says is that men and women have very strong preferences for nonfinancial partner traits correlated with education," Bruze said. "And educational sorting would remain even if the tendency of men and women to work with colleagues of a similar educational background were to disappear or if the role of educational institutions as a meeting place for future husbands and wives were to disappear."

It also means that if you're looking to marry actor and Ph.D. student James Franco, you might want to hit the books.

**More information:** Gustaf Bruze, "Marriage Choices of Movie Stars: Does Spouse's Education Matter?" *Journal of Human Capital* 5:1 (Spring 2011).

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