

# Educational expansion created more marriages by same educational level, race

August 19 2015

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Compulsory schooling laws instituted in the late 1800s and early 1900s caused more people in Northern states to marry people at their same education level and race, possibly contributing to economic inequality, according to a University of Kansas researcher's study.

Emily Rauscher, a KU assistant professor of Sociology, found no increase in assortative mating in Southern [states](#) as a result of the laws, suggesting the influence of educational expansion on marital sorting depends on context.

"It's difficult to know why the compulsory laws had different effects in the North and the South. I can only speculate, but perhaps schools were becoming more strongly segregated with the Great Migration in the 1800s," she said. "Black people were mostly migrating to urban centers in the North. As people married someone that they met in school who had a similar level of education, those people also happened to be of the same race as them."

Rauscher's article "Effects of Early U.S. Compulsory Schooling Laws on Educational Assortative Mating: The Important of Context" appears online in the journal *Demography*.

Compulsory schooling laws required students to attend school to a certain age, and Rauscher in other studies has found the requirement benefitted minority students and also contributed to creating better jobs and upgraded the opportunities of the American workforce especially in

the 1900s.

Federal officials and many states are currently considering the benefits of compulsory schooling laws. President Barack Obama has advocated for all states to increase the mandatory schooling age to 18, and Tennessee and Oregon have passed plans to offer two years of free community college to qualifying students.

Rauscher said the results about educational expansion on assortative mating were somewhat surprising. Nationally, the laws had minimal impact, but when she broke down her analysis by region, she found the differences. Modernization theory had predicted that rising education should increase people marrying those at the same [education level](#) but also increase interracial marriages.

For the study she used log-linear and log-multiplicative models of male household heads ages 36 to 75 in 1940 U.S. census data, which was the first census to include educational attainment information.

She said possibly due to regional differences in economic development, educational expansion increased assortative mating in the North but reduced it in the less-developed South. Northern states at the time were more industrialized, while Southern states relied more on agriculture.

Schools in the North could have been racially segregated especially in urban areas, which would be an important thing to consider today when considering compulsory schooling expansion, Rauscher said. She said if people more often marry someone of their same level of education, it can make it tougher for those living in poverty to use the educational system to improve their economic status.

"It could contribute to inequality," Rauscher said. "I don't want to underplay many other advantages of compulsory schooling. This is just

one possible downside."

She said more research is likely needed, especially to look at differences by individual states or metropolitan areas.

Provided by University of Kansas

Citation: Educational expansion created more marriages by same educational level, race (2015, August 19) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-08-expansion-marriages.html>

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