

Study analysis: gentlemen prefer blondes



- Kwong Ho Kuen

Everyday Social Psychology: Report on Media Article #2

A news article from The Independent reported that modern gentleman preferred “brains” rather than “blondes” (Lusher, 2014). Why do men value educational levels or intelligence over physical attractiveness? Is this argument just objective opinion or is it scientifically proved? If the phenomenon is true, can it be explained by social psychology?

In this paper, we will take a closer look at the issue with the help of concepts and theories of social psychology. We will first review the news article and capture the main ideas of it. Then, we will further investigate the scientific evidence referred by the news article. Afterwards, we will define the main issue going to be discussed. Finally, we will examine related empirical journal articles and apply the findings to the explanation of the issue.

Introduction of the Issue

Review of the news article

At the very beginning, let's review the news article and summarize its main points. The news article is titled “Gentlemen prefer brains: similarly educated couples last”. It was published in The Independent on July 27, 2014. It reports some findings from a recent study of marriage about associations between educational levels and divorce rates. It says that marriages between a better educated wife and less educated husband from 1950 to 1979 were 34 percentage more likely to divorce than the opposite one.

Furthermore, it is reported that couples having similar levels of education have a lower rate of divorce than marriages between a better educated husband and a less educated wife. Therefore, the article suggests that “similarly educated couples last”. The article quotes the title of a classic film called *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. It suggests that there was a common belief in the past that men preferred a less educated and maybe physically attractive wife. However, the research result suggests the opposite of it.

Closer look at the study being referred to

Does this article reflect the study finding subjectively? Is there are any personal opinions added to the article? With a view to examine the accuracy of report and gather further details about the study, the research being referred to in the news article is found. It is an empirical journal article titled “The reversal of the Gender Gap in Education and Trends in Marital Dissolution” (Schwartz & Han, 2014). It was published in the *American Sociological Review*, an academic journal, in 2014.

In this study, the researchers try to examine the risk of marital dissolution among marriages of couples with different combinations of educational level. These combinations include hypogamous marriages which a higher educated wife is married to a lower educated husband; hypergamous marriages which a lower educated wife is married to a higher educated husband; and a homogamous marriage which a couple with similar educational level get married.

The study makes use of demographic data in American from the National Survey of Family Growth, Panel Study of Income Dynamics and Current

<https://assignbuster.com/study-analysis-gentlemen-prefer-blondes/>

Population Survey from 1950 to 2009. It examines the divorce rate of hypogamous, hypergamous and homogamous marriages. In addition to comparing the divorce rate, the study also tries to examine the changes in relative risk of divorce among three types of marriages over decades. Two major results are found.

First, as reported in the news article, it is found that hypogamous marriages had a higher divorce rate than the hypergamous marriages before 1980. However, the association of higher divorce rate and hypogamous marriages no longer exists since 1990. In another word, the marriages between higher educated wives and lower educated husband are no longer more likely to break up in recent times. The study further asked if these hypogamous couples are less likely to divorce than hypergamous couples, but no conclusive evidence is found.

In addition to what the news article reports, the study also attempts to find out factors behind this change. It suggested that an increase in education level may affect. Although the relative educational attainment of wives in hypogamous marriages is still higher, the data showed that the individual educational attainment of both wife and husband in hypogamous marriages increase over the decades. However, no evidence can be found by using Cox proportional hazard model, a statistical analysis method.

On the other hand, the study also discovers that homogamous couples are less likely to divorce compared to hypergamous couples, as reported. What the news article does not include is the change of stability in these homogamous marriages. In 1950s, homogamous couples are no more likely

to divorce than hypergamous couples. However, they are even less likely to divorce than the hypergamous couples after 1990.

Going back to the news article, it is partly true to say that “ similarly educated couples last”. It is true that homogamous couples are less likely to divorce compared to hypergamous couples. However, it is not completely accurate to say homogamous couples are least likely to divorce among all. It is because the study did not run any three group comparison like Analysis of Variance to find supporting evidence. Also, it is accurate for the news to say that “ gentlemen prefer brains to blonde”. In the study, physical attractiveness was not measured and analyzed in any stages.

Defining the issue to be discussed

There are three ideas described in the news article. First, it is the mating preference of men to choose “ brains” which is believed to be education level or intelligence over “ blondes” which is believed to be physical attractiveness. As mentioned above, it is the reporter own comment rather what the research study finds. So, we are not going to focus on this idea.

The second idea is the relative divorce rate among hypogamous couples comparing to hypergamous couples. There is a change from positive correlation before 1980 to no association afterward. However, it is still inconclusive whether a reversed situation has occurred. At the same time, researchers have attempted, but fail to discover the contributing factors behind. The phenomenon is still being studied by researchers. We cannot illustrate much about this idea at the moment.

Finally, it is worth noticing about the stability of homogamous marriages. It is found that couples with similar educational background has less chance of marital dissolution comparing to hypergamous marriages. In this paper, we are going to illustrate this issue by social psychology concepts. We will see why people with similar educational background are attracted to each other. And we will see why couples of similar education background stay with each other.

Empirical Journal Article and Application to the Issue (1)

Attraction between People with Similar Educational Level

To become a stable marital relationship, the couples should be attracted to each other at the very first place. The news article said that similarly educated couples are less likely to divorce. In another word, people with similar educational background are attracted to each other. Can social psychology concepts illustrate that similar people attract each other? To be more specific, do people of similar educational level attract each other?

In Search of Empirical Journal Article

In order to find supporting evidence, a search of empirical journal articles is conducted. The search is carried out in a database of peer reviewed psychology scholarly journals called PsycINFO. To find the linkage between education and mating selection with similar others, the keywords of “ education” and “ assortative mating” are used. With a view to include results of words with similar meaning, the search further includes “ educational

attainment” and “ educational level” as alternative keywords to education. This is done with the help of the advanced search function.

The preliminary searches gave 61 results in total including 55 scholarly journals, 5 dissertations or thesis and 1 book. To further refine the search, the results are limited to scholarly journals. Results are also limited to, publication after 2000 in order to obtain most updated evidence. Afterwards, 33 results are left.

Related Empirical Journal Article Found

Among the 33 journal articles, one titled “ Match Makers and Deal Breakers: Analyses of Assortative Mating in Newlywed Couples” published in the Journal of Personality is selected (Watson et al., 2004). It tries to answer what qualities people look for in their spouses. It proposes that there are two ways in answering the question. One is to examine which traits or characteristics like social status or physical attractiveness people found desirable. The other method, which is used in this study, is to examine whether couples look for similarity or complementary in various aspects in their partners.

To see whether similarity or complementary people found desirable, the study looks into newly married couples. It is supposed that newly married couples are attracted to each other well enough so that they decide to get married. If similarity rather than complementary in most aspects is found among them, it may be inferred that people look for similarity in their romantic partners. To take one step further, it also examines the similarities in which aspects are more important.

<https://assignbuster.com/study-analysis-gentlemen-prefer-blondes/>

The study uses a sample of 291 couples married in less than one year in Iowa. They were invited to attend a small group session lasted for around two hours. During the session, participants were asked to complete questionnaires and took different tests. Information was collected regarding their demographic background, personality, emotional expression style, adult attachment style, religious attitudes, political attitudes, values, and intelligence.

After data collection, the researchers calculated the simple two-tail correlations between the husbands' and wives' scores on each aspect. If a strong correlation is found, similar in that aspect is significant for newlywed couples. In fact, strong similarity is found in age, religious and political views. Moderate similarity is found in educational attainment and verbal intelligence. Modest similarity is found in values. Little similarity is found in other aspects like personality and attachment styles.

In summary, this study finds significant similarities on various aspects among newly married couples in American. Newly married couples usually love each other to a certain extent that they decided to get married. Therefore, similarities in newlywed may suggest that people are attracted to similarities rather than complementary to others, especially in age, religion, political views, education and intelligence.

Application to the issue

Is similarity related to attraction as the news article writers? This is an issue in social psychology termed as assortative mating which is defined to be the “ nonrandom coupling of individuals based on their resemblance to each

<https://assignbuster.com/study-analysis-gentlemen-prefer-blondes/>

other on one or more characteristics (Buss, 1984). It is called positive assortment when significant similarity is found between husbands and wives. Conversely, it is called negative assortment when significant complementary is found among couples.

To date, there is much more evidence on positive assortment rather than the negative assortment (Bouchard & Loehlin, 2001; Mathews & Reus, 2001). It suggests that people do prefer similarity in their romantic partners rather than differences. In fact, the empirical journal article above also confirms that many similarities are found among newly married couples (Watson et al., 2004). To be more specific, moderate similarity in educational attainment is also found among newlywed in the study (Watson et al., 2004). This may illustrate why similarly educated couples get together as said in the news article.

Empirical Journal Article and Application to the Issue (2)

Relationship with Similar Education Background Last

Similarly educated couples getting together is only half of the story. The news article suggests that these couples also last longer. To be more accurate, the study being referred to finds that these couples have a lower risk of divorce comparing to couples with higher educated husbands. Why do similar couples divorce less? Do similar couples enjoy higher marital satisfaction? To be more specific, does similar education background associate with marital satisfaction?

In Search of Empirical Journal Article

<https://assignbuster.com/study-analysis-gentlemen-prefer-blondes/>

Again, in search of supporting evidences, we make use of the scholarly journal database PsycINFO. To find the linkage between similarity in couples and satisfaction in their relationships, the keywords of “ similarity” and “ marital satisfaction” are used. There are 240 results in this preliminary searches, including 152 scholarly journals, 77 dissertations or thesis and 11 book. To further refine the search, one more keyword “ socioeconomic” is added to explore specific if the similarity in socioeconomic status predicts marital satisfaction. Afterwards, 6 results are left.

Related Empirical Journal Article Found

Among the 6 results, an article titled “ Does Similarity Breed Marital and Sexual Satisfaction” published in the Journal of Sex Research is selected (Zhang, Ho & Yip, 2012). In this study, the researchers want to know if the similarity in couples is associated with marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. To take one step further, they also try to find out similarity in which aspects correlated stronger with marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction than other aspects.

This study makes use of the data from Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice survey in 2002. It is the longest running survey of family planning in Hong Kong. 1, 083 couples are chosen randomly from groups stratified by their living districts. They were invited to an individual interview answering a number of questions. Information is collected on their marital satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, socioeconomic background, religion, age, educational attainment, employment, and birthplace.

For each aspect, the researchers group the respondents according their similarity. For example, they divide the respondents into three education homogamy groups, namely husbands with higher education level, wives with higher education level and couples with the same education level. Then, for each group, the researchers further divide the respondents into maritally satisfied or dissatisfied groups according to their scores of marital satisfaction. Finally, the researchers calculate the correlation between different groups and their marital satisfaction using chi-square tests.

If significant correlation is found, it may suggest that similarity in certain aspect is associated with the marital and sexual satisfaction. In fact, this study finds out that education homogamy is a significant factor related to marital satisfaction especially the wives' marital satisfaction. There are other influencing factors like employment homogamy, while some of them are not influencing like religious homogamy and birthplace homogamy.

Application to the issue

The news article says that “ similarly educated couples last”. First of all, let's look at what makes a marriage last before discussing why similarly educated couples last. In social psychology, there are sufficient evidences that marital satisfaction predicts divorce (Hirschberger et al., 2009). Marital satisfaction is defined as the global evaluation of the marital relationship, which depicts a general picture of the relationship (Glenn, 1990). Generally speaking, the more the couples are satisfied with their relationships, the less likely they will divorce. In layman terms, happy marriages last.

If happy marriages last, is similarity related to marital satisfaction? There are evidences that couples with different age, religion, education or cultural have more conflicts than the counterpart (Cao, Fragmiere, Gauthier, Sapin & Widmer, 2010). To be more specific, does similarity in educational attainment associate with marital satisfaction? In fact, the empirical journal article we found do suggest that education homogamy is correlated with marital satisfaction (Zhang, Ho & Yip, 2012). This may illustrate why marriages of similarly educated couples last.

To look at the reason behind, social psychologists suggest that similarity in attraction is enhanced by the positive feeling resulted from consensual validation (Byrne, 1971). Similar people usually share the same values and attitudes and they socially validated each other. We may guest that similarity in education predict similarity in other aspects, because education is correlated with socioeconomic status like occupation, lifestyles, and abilities (Zhang, Ho & Yip, 2012). Therefore, more consensual validation may be found in education homogamy couples. As a result, the satisfaction resulted from social validation may influence the stability of their marriage.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, we read a news article from The Independent says “ similarly educated couples last”. We first ask why similarly educated couples get together. Social psychology concepts show that people are attracted by similarity of others. We also find the first empirical journal article supporting that similarity in educational background is desirable in marriages (Watson et al., 2004). Then, we ask why similarly educated marriages last. A second

empirical journal article shows that similarity in educational background is related to higher marital satisfaction (Zhang, Ho & Yip, 2012). And marital satisfaction is associated with divorce (Hirschberger et al., 2009). These all together illustrated the issue that marriage between a similarly educated couple is less likely to divorce.

References

- Bouchard, T. J. Jr., & Loehlin, J. C. (2001). Genes, evolution, and personality. *Behavior Genetics, 31* , 243–273.
- Buss, D. M. (1984). Marital assortment for personality dispositions: Assessment with three different data sources. *Behavior Genetics, 14* , 111–123.
- Byrne, D. E. 1971. *The Attraction Paradigm*. New York: Academic Press.
- Cao, N. V., Fragmiere, E., Gauthier, J. A., Sapin, M., & Widmer, E. D. (2010). Optimizing the marriage market: An application of the linear assignment model. *European Journal of Operational Research, 202* , 547–553.
- Glenn, N. D. (1990). Quantitative research on marital quality in the 1980s: A critical review. *Journal of Marriage & the Family, 52* , 818–831.
- Hirschberger G., Srivastava S., Marsh P., Cowan C. P., Cowan P. A. (2009). Attachment, Marital Satisfaction, and Divorce During the First Fifteen Years of Parenthood. *Personal Relationships, 16* , 3, 401–420.
- Lusher, A. (2014, July 27). Gentlemen prefer brains: similarly educated couples last. *The Independent* . Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk>
- <https://assignbuster.com/study-analysis-gentlemen-prefer-blondes/>

uk/news/science/gentlemen-prefer-brains-similarly-educated-couples-last-9631871.html

Mathews, C. A., & Reus, V. I. (2001). Assortative mating in the affective disorders: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 42, 257-262.

Schwartz, R. & Han, H. (2014). The Reversal of the Gender Gap in Education and Trends in Marital Dissolution. *American Sociological Review*, 79(4) , 605-629.

Watson D., Klohnen E. C., Casillas A., Simms E. N., Haig J., Berry D. S. (2004). Match makers and deal breakers: analyses of assortative mating in newlywed couples. *Journal of Personality*, 72 , 5, 1029-1068.

Zhang H., Ho S. Y., Yip S. F. (2012). Does Similarity Breed Marital and Sexual Satisfaction? *Journal of Sex Research*, 49 , 6, 583-593.