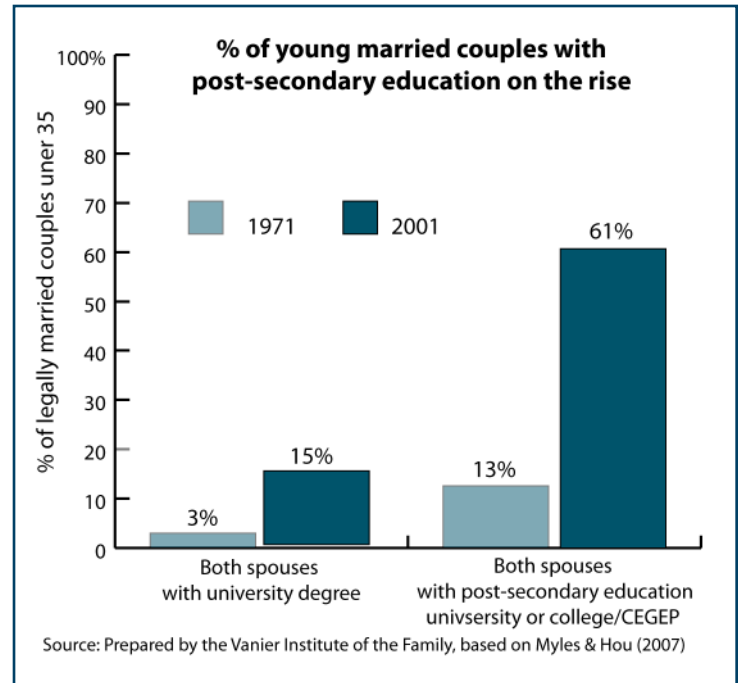


Assortative Marriage Who is marrying whom?

With wedding season on our doorstep, let's take a look at just who is marrying whom in Canada these days.

Historically, Canadian marriages have followed a fairly consistent pattern of timing and mate selection. But times have changed and, since the 1970's, many of the standard assumptions about who gets married, when and why have been redefined. Of particular note are changes to the rates of "educational marital homogamy" – the tendency of men and women to marry someone with similar levels of educational attainment and/or income earnings.

By looking at the research related to the changing role of education in marital mate selection, Feng Hou and John Myles conclude that the function of education in this selection process, among young adults in particular, is strengthening. In other words, education matters not just in terms of future job prospects, but with respect to future marital partner, as well.



So what?

Hou and Myles point out that this rise in educational homogamy has been driven largely by changes at the top and at the bottom of the educational hierarchy. It is now the case that those with a university education are much less likely than in the past to marry someone without a university degree: and, similarly, the odds of intermarriage between high-school graduates and those with less than high school completion has also significantly declined.

As such, the profile of married couples at the high end of the educational achievement spectrum is characterized by high earnings potential and a strong labour force attachment. Whereas, less well-educated couples typically receive lower wages and are at higher risk of unemployment.

Given what we know about the positive relationship between education and income (<http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/75-001-XIE/10606/art-1.htm>) and the important role that education plays in partner selection, this upward trend challenges us to consider educational homogamy as an important factor related to the rising income gap between families at the top of the earnings ladder and those at the bottom. (for more on the persistent income disparity typifying Ontario families, please see <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/Reports/2007/05/ReportsStudies1619/index.cfm?pa=A2286B2A>).