

Reflections on the impact of Education on Marriage

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In the past twenty years or so, enrollment of high school graduates of both sexes in colleges and graduate studies has taken place at an unprecedented rate in Lebanon, particularly in the capital to the extent that it has been taken for granted that the only normal thing to do after the Baccalaureate, is to go to university. At the same time, like previous generations, educated men and women are expected to marry and spend their adulthood in families of their own.

This paper is an attempt to study the impact of education on marriage. More specifically I am interested in finding out whether there is a relationship between the number of years spent in formal education after high school and the occurrence of disagreement in the life of married educated couples. (Caldwell in Moghadam, 1993; Blood in Heiss, 1969; Burchinal in Edwards, 1969; Hoffman & Wyatt in Heiss, 1969).

Stating the problem: Based on the reviewed literature

In this study, I intend to find out whether the situation among Lebanese educated couples confirms or negates findings of two studies. One study by Silberstein on dual-carrier marriages (1992) notes that advanced education for women may also be a risk factor for marital distress. Another survey (also reported by Silberstein) found that men whose wives were educated felt marriage to be more frequently stressful (Hornung & McCullough, 1981).

The other study was done by Safilios-Rothschild (in N.C.F.P., 1971) on power structure in married couples in a number of countries. According to this study, college education, plays a very important role in freeing Greek men from the traditional ideology about male dominance, so that they are willing to yield some decisions to women and consult them about others. It is the educated men who usually have liberal attitudes and wish to bring about changes in the traditional social order, and one of these changes regards attitudes toward the position of women in the family.

According to Sussman, most women expect their husbands to be companions and friends, to treat them as equals, and to consult them about all family decisions. She found that, as such, the wives' satisfaction with the marriage to be greater when the husband is well educated. A third interesting finding in this survey was that a wife's higher educational accomplishment tends to increase her power in the family, through greater participation in decision making processes.

For the lay people, education is strictly aimed at enabling women in the urban milieu to work and help their male kin in the support of the family. Improving the position of women, making women independent, expanding the pool of available choices for women as to what they want to do with their lives, allowing women to climb up the ladder of the bureaucratic formal sector of employment, having women compete with men for top positions, delaying the age of marriage, limiting the number of pregnancies ... were not really intended consequences. As seen above the intended impact of female education was strictly functional. The aim of this work is to find out whether university educated wives display those changes. Do Lebanese educated women, like Western women, seek a sense of achievement elsewhere than in the household? Does the educational system in the universities (almost a replica of the Western one), create a situation where women like men associate feelings of achievement with success in the intellectual or business world? Have they grown to perceive the traditional roles (nurturance and emotional support) as inadequate, incapable of such valued rewards?

The Model to this Study

Based on the statement of the problem, one could say that education, beyond high school, produces more change in the role expectations women come to develop about wives and husbands. They begin to see the traditional division of gender roles as blurred. Namely, they expect more involvement of men in the family and domestic roles and project for themselves, more participation in the formal sector through a new role, the work role.

Male university graduates generally identify with the work role in the first place; this is where they derive their masculine identity as opposed to women who are confined to the private sphere of the family and the household.

The model stipulates that more education for women seems to have created a situation in which there is role conflict between spouses.

The Hypothesis and Definition of Concepts

The study concentrates particularly on whether more education for women leads to disagreement on: who should do what and how much of the household/marriage roles (the domestic role), the work role, participation/autonomy of women in decision-making processes, and on the type of marital relationship spouses are expected to maintain (institutional v/s companionship marriage).

Thus to verify the main hypothesis the following corollaries must be taken into consideration. The first one is that more educated women expect their husbands to participate in housework and childcare. The second is that more educated women expect to share in the so called traditional roles of a husband (handle payments, have a job, be a breadwinner too....). The third corollary hypothesis, is that more educated women expect to be autonomous in deciding on matters that concern their person and participation/sharing in family decision making. The fourth, is that more educated women expect their husbands to be their friends and act as such.

Methodological issues in Testing the Model and the Derived Hypotheses

In my analysis I relied on the self-reports of both husband and wife in couples where I conducted semi-structured interviews of around half an hour. At the same time I formulated the questions in such a way that besides a simple yes or no, or selecting specific categories, they always had the chance to answer in an open ended manner. That is give their own explanation to certain behaviors, opinions and situations that I thought would shed light on the role expectations and performance of the spouses.

All of the interviewees were conducted separately with each spouse on his/her own. While I was interviewing one spouse the other one was not in the room and could not overhear the answers.

The Sample and the Procedure

I collected my data by interviewing* fifteen married couples who have graduated from the International College School. I.C. is known to incorporate a clearly defined set of cultural values in students emphasizing

a rather secular approach to education and social interaction (Abu, Hamzeh, 1980). As such if university education has a differential impact on its attendants, as I am claiming, this similarity would allow me to be more confident of my assumed conclusion. Namely that the change and the expected impact, if detected are the result of higher education. If the educated married couples were picked from here and there, randomly I would have a larger number of variables to control.

The married couples I interviewed shared very similar backgrounds and had been married for at least two years.

Findings of the study: Analysis/Assessment of the relationship between more education and tension in the marriage

If the main contention for this study is that more education for wives leads to a change in their role expectations of spouses in the marriage (from the traditional ones), my assumption is that a similar change in men's role expectations does not occur. Thus I am assuming that with more education for women comes the likelihood of greater instances of disagreement among spouses on gender role expectations in the marriage.

I compared the answers of the educated husbands and wives, on the several indicators I thought measure best the relationship between the variables. The fact is that two of the corollary hypotheses point to a similar relationship as the main hypothesis. The other two findings point to a need to modify the main hypothesis. As such, I provided a reformation of the main hypothesis as I thought should be done in the light of the findings.

The decision to say that data support a corollary was made on the following basis. If answers of more than fifty percent of the group of wives confirmed a change from the traditional expectations, as stipulated by the statement, I assumed that the corollary holds. The decision to say there is disagreement between spouses on role expectations was made on the following basis. When answers of more than fifty percent of the group of husbands, and answers of more than fifty percent of the group of wives, on one role indicator, point to a similar change as stipulated in the statement, I assumed that there was no disagreement on that issue. Thus I concluded that the main hypothesis regarding that role does not hold.

*** Finding # 1: More educated wives do expect their husbands to participate in the housework and childcare.**

I asked the spouses whether they thought an equal

division of household tasks was possible. The answers I received were never a straight “achievable” or “not possible”. Nevertheless analyzing the content I think one can come up with the following description:

Table 1: Percentages of answers of interviewed educated wives and husbands on the question:

Is an equal division of labor between spouses in household chores achievable or not possible?

	% of wives	% of husbands
An equal division of labor is achievable	63.33 %	43.33 %
An equal division of labor is not possible	36.67 %	56.66 %

The table shows that about 63.33% of the 15 wives said that they thought that an equal division of household work was achievable. More educated wives expect more involvement on behalf of husbands in house related work. However, the fact is that less than half the group of men share this expectation of themselves. Less than 50 % of husbands say that sharing the domestic role is achievable. This means that there is disagreement between this group of educated wives and husbands on who should do how much, and what, of the housework and childcare; men remain rather reluctant to become effectively involved in household tasks .

The fact that there is disagreement among educated spouses on the domestic role appears in the following finding, in table 2:

Table2: Percentages of answers of interviewed educated wives and husbands on the question:

What would you do if both of you were working and you start realizing that the housework is not done the way you expect it to be?

	% of Wives	% of Husbands
The couple will hire a housekeeper	13.33 %	60.00 %
The wife will take a less demanding job	56.67 %	26.67 %
The husband will help in the house tasks	23.33 %	13.33 %
The wife will stop working	6.67 %	—

The fact that 60% of the educated husbands do not suggest that a woman should stop working or find a less demanding job in the assumed situation is revealing of a change in role expectations in men from the traditional ones. More than 50 % proposed a housekeeper to be the solution. This means that they don't look at the marriage from the traditional perspective—that the housework is something a wife should do. This tells of a change in what educated men could expect of women in the domestic sphere; nevertheless this change is creating a situation of tension as a result of disagreement, at least in this sample.

When the above changes seem to have occurred regarding the domestic role, the childcare role is still perceived by the respondents as a core role to be played by wives, as the following table indicates:

Table 3: Percentages of answers of interviewed educated wives and husbands on the question:

When do you think that a married woman should stop working

	% of Wives	% of Husbands
In case she is pregnant/ until children start going to school	63.00 %	39.00 %
As long as she has children who go to school/ when she starts spending less time on child care than she had done before	20.00 %	60.00 %

Around 60 % of the husband respondents expect the wife to give priority to her role as mother over other roles. This is quite different from the trend detected in the answers of wives on the preceding question.

In 90 % of the cases childcare is exclusively the wives' responsibility. She is literally still responsible for everything: daily childcare, doctors' appointments, school related tasks etc.

As for the housework, the pattern is rather similar; sharing is not reported. In all of the cases, actual manual housework is done by a helper (housekeeper) supervised by the wife. Only two husbands of the fifteen help wives with cooking, washing the dishes (if there is no help), putting the children to bed, etc.. Some husbands used to help early on in the marriage, but they had to reduce any kind of participation as their business grew; the wife found herself responsible for all home management.

Having said all this, it is important to note that men do not seem to expect wives to sacrifice their career for housework. They expect them to do so for childcare. The educated wives on their part, are still ready to be flexible on the issue of career for the sake of better home management. (56.67 % said they would take less demanding jobs in case household gets messy). Still that is no sign of agreement.

The situation is rather indicative of an underlying disagreement on role expectations between educated spouses. Educated wives expect equal degree of involvement of spouses in the roles to be played in the marriage. That is not what they seem to be getting, nor what their husbands expect of themselves.

*** Finding #2: More educated wives do expect to play the role traditionally recognized as the husbands' (the work role)**

From the accounts of spouses, I could identify one role that husbands expect the wives to play, and the wives expect themselves to play, the work role. As in the literature, educated women do turn out to be high on the achievement need as they go up in higher education. As Hoffman pointed out in a study (Edwards 1969), feelings of achievement tend to be tied with having a job. The role of housewife and mother, however important to society, is not enough to cater for the woman's sense of achievement, competence and contribution.

In this sample, only 33.33 % of the educated wives who are still in their reproductive age, did not express an intention to have more children if their spouses agree; they all have a maximum of three children so far. Similarly, educated husbands do not expect women to invest exclusively in the mother role. Only 13.33 % of the group of husbands said that they agreed to the idea of more children if their wives agree.

Indeed there seems to be an underlying agreement among educated spouses on the centrality of a new role to the life of educated wives. Even those who preferred to just say that a married woman could work if she wanted to implied that wives are rather expected to do so.

Men do not seem to expect wives to sacrifice their career for housework

Table 4: Percentages of answers of interviewed educated wives and husbands on the question:

Do you think that a married woman should work and why?	% of Wives	% of Husbands
for the same reasons a man should work	13.33 %	33.33%
so as not to feel frustrated, bored, and marginalized	66.66%	26.66%
to be able to appreciate the efforts of her husband who works to support the family	0%	13.33%
in order to make use of the knowledge she invested all those years of her life to acquire	20.00%	0%

Wives are expected and expect themselves not just to earn a salary and help support the family. Rather they are expected to do so because there is some agreement that through higher education they have acquired skills that husbands have, and thus can contribute to the marriage in the same meaningful manner.

It is true that more than 50 % of the educated wives interviewed do not work, but they have always had part-time jobs or have done voluntary/social work. The rest, except for one, are currently working and have always worked. As for the exception, she confirms the above conclusions: before having children she had always had a full time job. Now she regrets the time she is wasting on building a career but given what she calls her 'perfectionist tendency', she has been unable to handle both a career and motherhood.

It is important to note that the husband of that wife like most husbands has not encouraged his wife to invest her efforts in a job for a variety of reasons mentioned above. In addition to the advantage of an extra income, some husbands of nonworking wives said that unless a woman works she can never get to understand the difficulty of financial support of the family, or be careful in handling expenditures.

Summing up on the first two findings

Among the sample of educated couples, first order pri-

ority is given to top quality in child raising (nurturance/socialization/emotional support role) rather than the housework.

This is supported by the above account on the time a married woman who is working is expected to stop working. It is also supported by the fact that when asked what they thought the idea of having a housekeeper, 60% of the group of husbands said they were for a maid unconditionally. 80% of the wives supported the idea in general, and 46.66 % among them emphasized that a housekeeper is a must especially when the couple have children. This will give them the time they need for adequate childcare and a 'meaningful' pass time.

On the whole, the reports of educated couples interviewed in this study do point to an agreement of spouses on the work role. Gender expectations on work for husbands and wives are rather met. The expectation of men is still rather traditional. They still expect themselves to be the main (if not sole) breadwinners of the household, and are expected to do so by the wives. This supports research findings (like Silberstein, 1994) and theorists' contentions like Parsons. The traditional gender linked division of roles persists in one form in the marriage, despite change. Work is rather more important for men and the domestic role is rather more important for women.

However, at the same time, a change pointed at Douglas, Moghadam, Marsot, Mernissi, Galdwell and others (in Edwards, 1969) did occur. Women do turn to perceive themselves to be rather active participants in society, and they do come to seek self fulfillment through non domestic occupations. As such there is agreement in marriages on this role; educated husbands do expect their wives to be other than good homemakers.

As expressed by husbands of this sample, work, even the unpaid form of it, does meet their expectations of their wives. For the majority of the wives too, work that serves the purpose of 'meaningful' contribution to marriage does not necessarily mean competition with men in the formal employment sector (it could be so, why not), but part time jobs too allow them to meet the expectation of being in the first place good wives and fit mothers. Social work is another good choice for the majority of the respondents. What matters is that the wife does not remain isolated in the household. The concern is that she interact with other human beings, and thus does not become marginal to society.

For women who can afford a housekeeper and agree on having one round the clock, the disagreement is downplayed- to the point that the tension it causes is

barely felt at all. However, when there is no housekeeper to take over the manual housework, it becomes impossible for many women to meet expectations on the work role, thus be the wives they want to be and their husbands expect them to be.

A couple of wives only recently hired a housekeeper. Before that they used to do all the housework. The husbands helped when asked, but never managed to fully share the responsibility. On the whole, men are still reluctant (to the point of refusal sometimes) to genuinely and effectively share with their wives in the performance of the domestic roles.

More education is having a differential impact on the traditional domestic role expectations. However, the disagreement on who ought to do what of the household tasks, is masked in this sample. They all have a helper who does the manual housework. As such, I think that the situation among married educated couples seems to be, in part, rather similar to what Khalaf describes as adaptive modernization (in Obeid, n.d.). Women are working and are doing less house work (if they do any). Yet the fact remains that no genuine change towards effective sharing regarding the domestic roles has taken place.

Thus one could say that role expectations of educated men, either do not change at all; or through education and along the process of modernization, these roles only get to be reconfirmed.

Men still derive their identity from the work role much more than women do from the house roles. As for educated women, they identify with the work role in addition to the traditional one.

*** Finding # 3: More educated wives do expect their husbands to treat them as friends.**

Among the educated spouses interviewed, the understanding of friendship corresponds very much to the descriptions of companionship marriages available in the literature. Educated spouses tend to consider open communication and expression of emotions and sharing of thoughts to be signs of a healthy marital relationship.

Reality as reflected in the answers on the educated spouses to a set of questions indicates a similar set of expectations regarding interaction in the marital relationship.

Only 13.33 % of the husbands said that it was not necessary that spouses be friends. The rest of the respondents unanimously identified friendship as a major component within the marriage. Only one said "not

necessarily” (this couple has been married for 28 years- hence this different answer could be due to the fact that for the generation he belongs to expectation on this issue was still traditional).

That the interviewed spouses gave rather similar answers as to who is the first person they would go to when they had very good news they wanted to share or when they felt down, is indicative of a shift in the marital relationship towards friendship.

Table 5: Percentages of answers of interviewed educated wives and husbands on the question:

When I have very good news and/or feel down	Good News		Feel Down	
	%of Wives	%of Husbands	%of Wives	%of Husbands
I would go to my spouse first	73.34%	66%	59.99%	53.33%
I would go to a parent/friend first	-	-	33.33%	13.33%
Depending on the news, I decide to tell who	26.67%	33.33%	6.66%	33.33%

More than fifty percent of the husbands and wives said that they would behave in a way that is in line with their understanding of friendship in the marriage. More than fifty percent of them as the table shows mentioned the spouse to be that person.

In reports of both groups, wives and husbands, all respondents emphasized that they felt free to criticize each other and that there was rarely any topic that they did not discuss. However, almost all emphasized that, if they said this it did not mean they agreed on everything. They do disagree but feel secure enough to discuss almost any topic.

I tried to probe the respondents more on this question in order to make sure that they are not just trying to get over with this question. However, there is one fact that is indicative of change, the fact that all husbands, except three said they discussed work with their wives.

Those who said that they did not discuss work, emphasized that it is particularly work related problems that they don't discuss so as not to worry their wives. One husband gave a different answer. He said he avoids discussing work with his wife because she risks influencing his professional judgment of matters, “women tend to be more biased in their judgment” he said.

The change from the traditionally expected pattern of interaction, identified in the above, is not one sided as the findings of this study suggest. Husbands seem to expect the same of themselves and of their wives. Like the wives they regard each other as friends and companions. A similar conclusion was already suggested in a study done by Stafiliou-Rothschild on Greek and French couples in the nineteen sixties.

*** Finding #4: More educated wives tend to expect to participate in decision making processes**

I asked wives as to what they would do if the following situation arises: the couple had to buy a piece of furniture for the house, and it so happens that the husband disagrees to his wife's choice (and vice versa). All of the wives' answers veered rather towards imagining the decision to be shared; that they will keep looking for another alternative until they agree on one choice or until one convinces the other of the choice. The answers summarized as follows tell of such a situation :

Table 6: Percentages of answers of interviewed educated wives and husbands on the question:

If the spouses disagree on the choice of a piece of furniture	%of Wives	%of Husbands
<i>keep looking until we agree on a choice</i>	80.00%	60.00%
wife decides last	13.33%	26.66%
husband decides last on the appropriate price	6.66%	13.33%

As the table above shows, more than fifty percent of the husbands also point to a greater likelihood that a household related decision is to be reached by agreement upon negotiation (some couples emphasized that they will do this for as long as it requires).

This, I believe to be rather indicative that the wives' participation in decision making is at least thought of as plausible, if not expected or is what actually takes place.

This is true that, even if the wife works, and if the husband is the breadwinner. Still in all the cases, expenditures of the family were from an account that the husband finances and to which the wife had open access. She could draw from it as needed since all wives have a check book to access that account. There was no suggestion that she cannot draw unless the husband allowed it. Most of the couples even expressed a

dislike for the idea of separate accounts; some had tried it and had decided to give it up.

Couples where wives work do not report that wives have to contribute a percentage of their income to the household expenditures. If they don't have an income of their own, they can draw from either a joint account or a separate one as they deem necessary. If they worked, they all said that they disposed of that income as they saw best fit. They all said that the manner they used their income was their own decision without their being influenced by the husband's opinion. Two husbands particularly added that they were not bothered at all by the fact that they did not know how their wives spent their income.

Though subtle, this fact backs up my conclusions above, on the participation of women in decision making. I said in the above that all of the respondents said that a married woman should work. This drives one to conclude that the fact that more than fifty percent of the educated wives do not have jobs, is , not an imposed decision. Their husbands do not think that they must stay home. They could work if they want to. If they decide not to, they are not made financially dependent in the traditional sense (allowance imposed by husband for all expenditures, even personal purchases). In case of budgeting, in more than fifty percent of the cases, the amount to be spent, (provided by the husband,) is decided by both. The same applies to the decision of being just a housewife; it is the result of agreement or sometimes the wife's choice.

In most of the cases, some kind of a deal was reached between the spouses. The wife is to be in charge of the home management and the husband will be the provider. This is just an adaptive measure given the reluctance of men to become more involved in the domestic chores. Most of these women do expect more involvement from the husband in house tasks. They agree to this choice because, as they all say, even if a husband goes with the idea of sharing house tasks, the wife can never find a job that pays enough to allow the husband to give up his demanding job in order to devote more time to domestic work.

Summing up on the third and fourth findings:

Based on the above, educated persons of both genders expect to treat their partners in marriage as friends and companions, and expect to be treated as such.

The fact that the university educated women of this sample do report in their answers on role expectations, a deviation from the traditional type of marriage, comes in support of the earlier study mentioned above, the one done by Stafilos-Rothschild. Educated hus-

bands of this sample do show a departure from the traditional ideology of male dominance. They show a willingness to yield some decisions to women and consult them about others. The other change is that both wives and husbands, expect each other to be companions and friends, to be treated as equals, and to consult on family decisions. These findings confirm Stafilo-Rothschild's findings in the study done on Greek couples in the 1960s.

As such the main hypothesis to this study needs to be modified to acknowledge the fact that more education for women does not lead to tension regarding two issues: the expectation to be treated as a friend and that of participation in decision making. The educated husbands and wives show in their expectations and conduct a similar move towards rather liberal expectations as far as the interactional roles are concerned, as far as the work role is concerned, but not as far as the domestic role is concerned.

Concluding Remarks

More confident conclusions on the issue of the impact of education on marriage could have been more informative if the analysis was carried to a third level. Supporting, modifying, or completely opposite findings could have been found had one compared couples where the wife was more educated than the husband, as educated as the husband, and less educated than the husband.

Education is recognized in the social sciences to be a major agent of change; particularly to cause a shift from traditional ways to modern ones. So the question that arises is whether the huge fortunes spent on years of education after high school have improved our lives as adults (instead of going for a technical diploma, or immediately working, or getting married), as they claim to do. The question becomes more pertinent when one keeps in mind that modernity allows the individual more control over his/her circumstances; yet, the rising rate of divorce reported in society, especially among modern couples is another case that must be looked into.

Concerning the education men and women receive in university, the assumption is generally that the impact is similar on both. In my model I assumed that education produces a differential impact on husbands and wives in terms of modernization of gender linked expectations (change from traditional ideologies). My findings confirmed my expectations regarding only one role, the domestic one, which also supports findings of the study done by Silberstein, as well as the findings of a number of other studies.

The findings of this study echo Mary Glenn Wiley's views on Western societies, and I think applies to the

educated married couples of this sample (graduates of western universities) (Reynolds, 1993). Wiley found that in Western societies there are two identities of extreme importance: work and the family. Men and women are differentially socialized into the fulfillment of these roles; nevertheless, men end up socialized into the identity of work more than that of the family.

In this study I also found that education does seem to free men from the traditional ideology about male dominance in the household and the work role. Thus it supports the findings of Blood and Wolfe's "resource theory"; education does act in this respect as resource for women, just like employment and money (Hicks in N.C.F.P., 1971). All educated men in this sample do expect their wives to have some kind of a non-domestic occupation along the domestic one, and to participate in decision making. They also seem to meet the wives' expectations in that they expect to be treated by their wives like friends and companions.

Indeed as is stipulated in an essay (in DeBurger, 1977), higher education along with the other modernizing forces (agents of social change), do seem to spell the end of the traditional division of sex roles.

Blood reports that five studies found that more employment (education) for women is associated with more participation of men in the domestic division of labor (Heiss, 1969). This potential for conflict, in the case of the Lebanese couples seems to be curtailed by the hiring of relatively cheap housekeepers (as compared to local native help). As long as the couples can afford a housekeeper, the disagreement remains dormant. However, if this luxury cannot be afforded, there is no guarantee to what might happen as a result of the disagreement.

The last remark regards the lingering of disagreement caused by the role conflicts social change brings about in interpersonal relationships, particularly marriage. When society starts to encourage opposing social behaviors in people, roles have to be justified to a number of contingencies. If, for instance, the role conflict modern women are found with as a result of the employment alternative is kept to linger, it may be threatening to the relation. As Jacobson (in Heiss, 1969) points, disagreement on role expectations which remains unresolved can lead to stress. As such a study needs to be developed to see whether stress occurs in the life of educated married couples as a result of women having to take up the domestic role against their expectations and whether this stress can be a sufficient reason for divorce.

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