The Effect of Gender Roles on Marital Satisfaction

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Gender Roles on Marital Satisfaction

Abstract
The study was designed to examine the effects of gender roles on marital satisfaction. Participants \((N = 20)\) completed a three section questionnaire. The first section was the Dutch Marital Satisfaction questionnaire, 9 questions. Responses were on a 4 interval scale to determine the satisfaction of the participant’s marriage. Section two, 4 questions, concerning education of participants and participant’s spouse, years they had been married, and how many children they had (if they had any). The third section was 25 questions taken from the Attitudes Towards Women Questionnaire. Participants would answer questions on a 4 interval scale to determine if the participant had a more traditional or egalitarian view. The significant finding was that the more education a person receive, the more egalitarian view they hold; the less education a person has achieved, the more traditional view they possess \((p<0.05)\). The study did not support the hypothesis that with a more egalitarian view one is more satisfied in an egalitarian marriage and with a more traditional view, one is more satisfied in a traditional marriage. Also, the study did not support the second hypothesis, that the effect of education on the development of egalitarian views would be more pronounced in women than in men. For future research I would find other questionnaires that measure marital satisfaction and views of gender. I would also look at divorced couples and their education levels to determine if their education played a part in their divorce.
Introduction

Today, in U.S. society there are two main views of marriage: the traditional view and the egalitarian view. The traditional view believes that man's main role is at work, the public sphere, and the woman's main role is at home, the private sphere (Akotia & Anum, 2012). The woman typically is a stay-at-home mom with less education, while the man has the higher education. "Men are expected to have goals consistent with work centrality, whereas women are expected to align themselves with family centrality" (Desai, Chugh, & Brief, 2014, pg. 332). An example of this could be the Draper marriage in Mad Men (Weiner (creator), 2007, Mad Men [Television Series]. Los Angeles, CA: Lionsgate Television), where the man works all day and comes home to find a doting wife with dinner on the table. The egalitarian view, which has grown in recent popularity, states, "Power and roles are distributed equally between men and women" (Akotia & Anum, 2012, pg. 5023). In this type of marriage, gender roles are not important. There is an equal division of labor between the husband and wife and they are dual wage earners, "in which the husband and wife both work full time and share financial responsibility for the family's well-being" (Desai et al., 2014, pg. 332). A good example of this view is The Cosby Show (Cosby, Bill (Producer). 1984. The Cosby Show (Television Series). New York City, NY: Carsey-Werner Company) Mr. Huxtable is a medical doctor and his wife is a lawyer; they share responsibilities at home and monetarily. A part of egalitarian marriages, as seen in the professional degrees of both of the Huxtables, is homophily, which is the tendency for similar individuals to associate together. Relationships are influenced by homophily because those who are different than us are more difficult to interact with (McPherson et al., 2001).

One source of people’s views about marriage comes from history. Historically, men and women have been taught to "specialize in the necessary characteristics and skills to carry out the
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most significant role for them” (Calvo-Salguero, Garcia-Martinez, & Monteoliva, 2008, pg. 536). Males were taught to go out into the world, work, and be the breadwinner for the family. Females were taught to be the "heart of the family” (Calvo-Salguero et al., 2008). This idea of special characteristics for gender roles is called gender role socialization. This began to break down in the 1970's however, "as the emergence of the feminist movement and the progressive incorporation of women into the labor market” (Calvo-Salguero et al. 2008 pg. 536). This expansion of the woman's role into workforce influenced the way women were seen, weakening gender role socialization. An important effect of the expansion of the woman's role is that it changed the educational level women could reach. It began in the 1970s as can be seen by looking at the level of college enrollment by gender. By 1980 there were 1.1 females in college for every 1 male, a trend that continued because per U.S. Census Bureau Reports in 2009, 1.3 females were enrolled for every 1 male (2012). There has been a huge increase in the number of women achieving higher education, but what does that translate into about their view on gender roles. Evidence indicates that in women, the more egalitarian (as opposed to traditional) their view of marriage tends to be higher the level of education (Calvo-Salguero et al., 2008). It is also seen in that the greater the professional level of a woman, the more egalitarian view on marriage, she holds (Akotia & Anum, 2012).

Higher education does not just affect women's beliefs about egalitarian and traditional marriages, but men’s as well. Brewster and Padavic (2000) found that with college comes a more egalitarian attitude. Conservatism was more present with the subjects who had less than 12 years of education. As the education increases from 12, to 13-13, and to 16 or more, the conservatism levels decline and the egalitarian views increase (Brewster & Padavic, 2000, pg. 484). Calvo-Salguero et al. (2008) similarly said that, "when the level of education is low, men and women
adhere more to the traditional gender role orientations than when the level of education is high” (pg. 544). Higher education opens one's mind to the inequality of domestic labor, discrimination, and recognizing the great influence that men have over women in education, the work force, and in traditional marriages. For all of the aforementioned reasons, higher education is associated with a more egalitarian view of marriage instead of a more traditional view.

Outside of the educational effect we know women as a whole are more egalitarian than men. Brewster and Padavic (2000) noted that women had lower conservative scores (traditional scores) than men did when tested both in 1977 and 1996. Similarly, Kane (1995) stated that women express more egalitarian views on marriage, income, and childcare than men. "About 50 percent of men and 70 percent of women express at least some dissatisfaction with women's social influence relative to men although women express stronger grievance” (Kane, 1995, pg. 81). This mean that males tend to score lower in egalitarian views than females (Kane, 1995, pg. 81). This meaning that males have more traditional views than females, who tend to have a more egalitarian view. There has been an increasing tendency to the egalitarian view for both males and females as will be shown, however it is much stronger with females, especially since many are now getting a higher education.

In many different locations in the world such as Germany, Netherlands, Ireland, Great Britain, and Australia. "Public opinion is these countries is shifting away from traditional norms of universal marriage and childrearing” (Gubernskaya, 2010, pg. 179). Malta, Melbourne, and Farquharson (2014) looked at older relationships (around age 60) in Australians and found that they looked for more egalitarian relationships based on emotional and sexual equality, than they have in the past. This is happening not only in foreign countries but in the United States, many have a preference for egalitarian marriage over traditional marriage. Rooks and King show that
"social class black adolescents [middle class] expect equalitarian marriage roles concerning authority, housekeeping, and the care of children” (Rook & King, 1973, pg. 317). In the 60s and 70s women were beginning to go to college more and obtaining more and better jobs than previously, thus their views were more egalitarian. Male scientists, whose normal efforts would be mainly directed to their work, have a new focus on their household. In a study done by Damaske, Ecklund, Lincoln, and White, (2014), the "findings suggest male scientists hold strong work devotions, yet a growing number seek egalitarian relationships, which they frame as reducing their devotion to work” (Damaske et al., 2014, pg. 477). Since the idea of fatherhood is changing in the modern world, more husbands are pitching in with children and housework. Marriage preference is turning away from the traditional style to the egalitarian style.

Given that there are different views of marriage and that they are linked to education, is there evidence on which view is more associated with happiness or satisfaction? There seems to be conflicting reports with some articles arguing for expanded contentment in traditional marriage while others argue that couples are better off in an egalitarian marriage. According with previous unpublished research, based on people's expectations and/or beliefs, marriages where there was not homophily, but inequality, found evidence that men who have a higher education level than their wives are more satisfied and have less conflict than marriages where the wife has the greater level of education (Mersmann, 2014). A marriage where the husband and wife have the same education, for example: masters and masters, is perceived to be more satisfying than if their education levels were different, for example: PhD. and a high-school diploma (Mersmann, 2014). Similarly, Aida and Falbo (1991) found that, "People who see themselves as equal partners are more satisfied with their relationship than traditional partners” (Aida & Falbo, 1991, pg. 43). Both sexes believed that to have a happy and long lasting relationship the marriage
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partners need to be homogenous on education. Many couples are homogamous in education, but when inequality does occur, it is more often with the husband having more education than the wife. Skopek, Schulz, and Blossfeld (2009) state that "women are still reluctant to contact men with lower educational degrees. They are more satisfied with men who have a higher educational qualification (pg. 485)" Likewise, men are much more likely to contact a woman with a lower educational level than a woman with a higher educational level. What does this evidence indicate, in the end it indicates that the population is not homogeneous and that there are at least two groups that must be considered when looking at marriage research. There are men and women who would be happier in a traditional marriage, a subpopulation picked up in some of the studies above. There is also a group of people that would be happier in an egalitarian marriage, and other studies found this category to be in the majority. The general rule is homophily, but there are occasional inequalities, and when there are, they are more likely to have the form where the husband has a higher education than his wife, than the other, where the wife has a higher education than her husband.

My hypothesis was that people who have a more traditional gender role attitudes will be more satisfied in a traditional marriage where the husband has a higher education level than his wife. People who have a more egalitarian view of gender roles will be more satisfied if they have a spouse with the same education level as themselves. I further suspected that the higher the education level of the participant, the more egalitarian he/she would be. If the participant was a woman, this difference would be even more pronounced. To test this hypothesis I administered two questionnaires. The first was a marital satisfaction questionnaire (Van Den Troost et al., 2005) and the second was the Attitudes Towards Women Scale (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapps, 1978). These were supposed to test the gender roles view on satisfaction in marriage.
Method

Participants

20 married adults participated in this study. They were selected from acquaintances of
the experimenter. All participants were married. The marriage range was 7 to 34. 11 were female
and 9 were male. The age range was 28 to 68 and the average age was 48. Their ethnicities were
18 Caucasian, 1 African American, and 1 American.

Materials

The experimenter created and used an online survey through google docs to ask
participants about their marital satisfaction, education, spouse's education, and gender roles view.
The first section contained The Dutch Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire (Van Den Troost,
Vermulst, Gerris, & Matthijs, 2005). The Cronbach's alpha that Van Den Troost found for
marital satisfaction was .81, this means the scale has high internal consistency (Van Den Troost
et al., 2005). This questionnaire contains seven statements to evaluate the participant's marital
satisfaction. One example of a statement is: "I expected more from the relationship with my
partner." Each question has a response scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). If
participants selected low scores, then their marital satisfaction will be low. If participants
selected high scores then marital satisfaction will be high. Section two consists of asking the
participant's education level and their partner's education level. The third section, the participants
are given the Attitudes Towards Women Scale (Spence, Helmrich, & Stapp, 1978). There are 25
statements on this scale to evaluate if the participant has an egalitarian or traditional view of
gender roles (employment settings, income, household tasks etc.) An example of a question is:
"There are many jobs in which men should be given preference over women in being hired or
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promoted.” Each statement has a response scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). The scale measures how traditional or egalitarian a participant's view is on gender roles in today's society.

**Procedure**

Participants were told the study was about gender roles and marriage. Participants were sent an e-mail like, https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1eNppJvB3iKMHGYVQ6yvsqd4-hUsd8pOFnjoztV0c2LA/viewform, to an online survey. The informed consent was the first thing the participant saw and if they agreed they clicked continue. The survey was generally completed within 20 minutes. Once participants completed the survey they were directed to a debriefing form and thanked for their participation.

**Results**

Using the results from the survey I calculated reliability using Cronbach’s Alpha for the Dutch Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire and the Attitudes Towards Women Questionnaire (AWS). These two test statistics are to understand how well the questions for each questionnaire agree. The Dutch Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire was found to have a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.87, high internal validity. The 25 questions for the Attitudes Towards Women Questionnaire also had a high internal validity with a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.88. I tried to predict Marital Satisfaction using multiple regression with the factors of male’s education level, female’s education level, AWS, and the interactions of these three predictors. Unfortunately, none of these factors were significantly related to marital satisfaction. Having all of the factors in the model did not improve the prediction above chance, $F(7, 12) = 1.944, p = 0.149$. The analysis that
follows, based on the plots, should be considered tentative and needs to be tested in future research.

I expected that participants who had a more egalitarian view, would be more satisfied in an egalitarian marriage. Participants who had a more traditional view would be more satisfied in a traditional marriage. My hypothesis was not supported. Figure 1 shows the interaction between the factors of Marital Satisfaction, AWS, and education, there was not a significant interaction between these three factors. The X-axis represents the score on the AWS. The Y-axis measures marital satisfaction. The five columns represent the difference in education level between the wife and the husband. The column that says, -2, means that the wife has two more education levels than her husband. The column that says, 2, means that the husband has two more education levels than his wife. The column that says 0 represents homophily, both the husband and the wife have the same education level. In this graph a more satisfied marriage has a lower

**Figure 1: AWS, Marital Satisfaction, and Education Plot.**
value, a less satisfied marriage has a higher value. If my hypothesis was correct, you would see a positive correlation between AWS and Marital Satisfaction when husbands have more education than their wives (right side of the plot). You would have also seen a negative correlation between AWS and Marital Satisfaction when the wife has more education than her husband. However, as evidenced by Figure 1, at every level of husband and wife education, the line is nearly flat.

Please draw your attention to Figure 1, fourth column (it says 1). This is the only line that is slightly higher than the others on marital satisfaction. This is the traditional marriage, where the male has one level of education higher than the female. This line is not significant, it will need further research.
Figure 2 is a correlation plot between the two questionnaires, AWS and Marital Satisfaction. AWS is on the X-axis; lower scores mean traditional marriage and higher scores mean a more egalitarian marriage. Marital Satisfaction is on the Y-axis; 1-2 means satisfied, 3-4 means dissatisfied. The pink line represents females, and the blue line represents males. All results were not significant, however an interesting trend occurred. As AWS scores go up (become more egalitarian), marital satisfaction scores increase for women, but remain stable for men. This suggests that egalitarian marriages may lead to more happiness for women and have no effect on men.
Figure 3 is a plot of Marital Satisfaction by difference in education. The difference of education is on the X-axis. The negative numbers represent the wife having a higher education than her husband. The positive numbers represent the husband having a higher education than the female. The pink line represents females and the blue line represents males. Please notice the -2 on the X-axis. This represents that the wife has two education levels above her husband. Please notice the 2 on the X-axis, this represents the husband having two education levels higher than his wife, there is no gender difference in Marital Satisfaction. Marital satisfaction is on the Y-axis; 1-2 means satisfied and 3-4 means dissatisfied. Interestingly, the satisfaction is lower for women than it is for men.
In *Figure 3*, Marital Satisfaction scores are low, indicating satisfaction, almost all of the scores are 1-2, on a 4 point scale (1-2 being satisfied). The exception was the two people who marked husband’s education as one year above the wife’s education. These traditional style marriages, seemed very dissatisfied. However, this was interpretation from the three plots above, none of the above plots or tests were statistically significant, more research will have to be conducted.

The final part of my hypothesis was that egalitarianism increased with education, this was statistically significant, $r(19) = +0.49$, $p = .03$. *Figure 4* shows the correlation between AWS and level of education. The level of education is on the X-axis, and the AWS is on the Y-axis. As can be seen in *Figure 4*, the correlation is positive, suggesting that as level of education increase, scores on AWS also increases. Higher AWS scores means a more egalitarian view, whereas lower AWS scores means a more traditional view. Thus, according to this experiment, the higher the education, the more egalitarian view a participant will have.
Discussion

The study was done to look at how gender roles influenced the satisfaction of marriage. I hypothesized that participants with a traditional view would be more satisfied in a traditional marriage and participants who have an egalitarian view would be more satisfied with an egalitarian marriage. This hypothesis was not supported by the data. In addition, it was hypothesized that the higher the education level, the more egalitarian the participant would be. If the participant were female, she would have a stronger egalitarian view than a male at her same education level. This hypothesis, females were hypothesized to be more egalitarian than males, was not supported by the data, however the correlation between education and gender roles
proved to be significant. The higher the education level, the more egalitarian view one would hold, this fits in nicely with the previous research.

My hypothesis, that people with a traditional view will be more satisfied with a traditional marriage and people with an egalitarian view will be more satisfied with an egalitarian marriage, was not supported by this study. At every level of husband-wife education, the line is flat. The only time it was not flat was at the 1 column, which meant that male’s level of education is 1 above the females, indicating that people are more dissatisfied in a traditional marriage. However, keep in mind this study was not significant. All five lines in Figure 1, were flat. I believe that this indicates that the participants did not understand the questions. I received many comments stating the confusion or awkward wording of the two questionnaires that were used. They were also dissatisfied that the Likert ranged only from 1-4, and not 1-5. Participants noted that they would have liked to have a 1-5 scale so they could mark a grayish area or a question they did not understand.

When reviewing my Figure 3 graph I noticed that all the marital satisfaction scores are high. Actually, 18 of participants scored their marital satisfaction at either a 1 or 2. A 1 or 2 means their marital satisfaction is high, whereas if they scored a 3 or 4, their marital satisfaction would be low. Only 2 participants marked the marital satisfaction as low. This leads to another limitation, my sample may be biased by having lots of people who are happy in their marriages. This is another possible reason why my data was flat lines instead of a positive or negative line. (?)

The second half of my hypothesis, previous research suggested that participants with a higher education will have a more egalitarian view. My hypothesis was supported, as you can see
in *Figure 4*, there is a positive correlation. The positive correlation was significant and said that the more education one had, the more egalitarian his/her views were. This was exactly what I thought I would find and what previous research had suggested. This positive correlation could be because after obtaining many years of school (undergrad and grad) women and men are more enlightened and more accepting of the modern way of thinking that centers around a family as an equal partnership between a husband and a wife. In addition women who increase their education want to use their skills they have acquired and obtain a well-paying job, thus contributing to the income of the family. For all of the aforementioned reasons, higher education is associated with a more egalitarian view of marriage instead of a more traditional view.

My final hypothesis was that females would have a more egalitarian view than males if they both had the same level of education. The correlation was positive, but not significant, females were only slightly more egalitarian than males. This meant that men and women held similar egalitarian views the more education they received. This trend could have been significant given a larger sample size, but with my study there were not enough subjects.

If I were to re-do this study I might look for different questionnaires that measure marital satisfaction and views of gender. Participants seemed to not understand or were confused about many questions that were asked from the Dutch Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire and the Attitudes Towards Women Questionnaire. Some felt that these questions were poorly worded. For future directions beyond this study I would like to look into divorced couples and then their educations. This would allow me to evaluate if their differing education levels might have contributed to their marital dissatisfaction. For example, if the wife had a PhD, while her husband had a masters, this could have been a cause for conflict and divorce.
In summary, I did not find a relationship between gender roles and marital satisfaction, but I did find an interaction between education and gender roles. I do believe research will have to be done to explore the relationship between gender roles and marital satisfaction, with a larger sample size. I found that as education increases a more egalitarian view develops and when there is little education, there is a more traditional view; these results align with previous research. Education, higher or lower, has a powerful impact of women’s and men’s views of egalitarian and traditional marriages, satisfaction will have to be determined by future experiments.
References


