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Strategies for Closing the Educational Gaps among Palestinian Couples in Israel

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Abstract
This study deals with attitudes and mechanisms among Palestinian couples who have been married a long time and have educational gaps between husband and wife. Thirty-three couples—married for at least 20 years, and at the time of their marriage the difference in their educational levels was at least six years or two academic degrees—were chosen from the three religious groups (19 Muslim couples, 10 Christian couples and 4 Druze couples). The methodology was qualitative, and in-depth interview was conducted with each participant. The study's findings indicate that educational compatibility between husband and wife was not a determining factor for men in choosing their future wives. Men who are more educated than their wives do not invest in women's education, while women make the upgrading of their husbands' education their major marital project. This study shows that patriarchal values in Arab families supersede other modernizing factors such as education or occupation of women.

Keywords
educational gaps, Arab couples, patriarchal values

At a workshop held at the University of Haifa in 2006, Hiam,[1] an Arab woman in her early 40's, shared her dream of the past 21 years with the participants:[2]

[1] Name has been changed to maintain confidentiality.

[2] This is a loose translation of extensive parts of Hiam's appeal to academic circles to help her and other women in her situation.

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> I never imagined I would be a housewife or a traditional woman. I always thought I would be a high-ranking career woman. And then I met my husband… and from that day on my life changed… over a period of four years, I became pregnant three times. I was busy raising my children and taking care of the home… I rarely left the house. I could no longer even think about pursuing a higher education… I took a three-month computer course and after that another three-month course in cosmetics. During the next year, I continued to take courses in arts and crafts, and I also helped my husband from time to time.[3] I was again overcome by feelings of emptiness… the idea of pursuing a higher education again began to dominate my thoughts, but I did not find anyone to encourage me or help me control my anxieties about this…

This paper has two major objectives: (1) to monitor strategies used by Palestinian[4] couples who have been married a long time and have differing educational levels; (2) to examine how couples in which the husband is better educated differ from those in which the wife is better educated.

Literature Review

The theoretical literature points to a number of factors contributing to the changing status of Arab women in the family, the community and society. One major factor is the educational level of Arab women, which has risen significantly in recent decades. After the establishment of the State of Israel, a greater emphasis was placed on education, resulting in a rise in the percentage of people who were educated, particularly among women, who had begun at a lower educational level (Abu-Baker, 1985; Azaiza, 2006). The Compulsory Education Law passed shortly after the State of Israel was established forced Arab families to enrol their daughters in school (Abu-Baker, 1985). With time, the presence of girls in school granted legitimacy to further education for women (Khashiboun, 1997), which eventually became desirable and positive. Among other things, the percentage of girls attending high school has risen to the point that girls constitute the majority of Arab high school pupils. Moreover, the number of Arab women attending institutions of higher education has risen so that today more Arab women pursue higher education than Arab men (Haj Yahia-Abu Ahmad, 2006; Central Bureau of Statistics, 2005b; Azaiza, 2006).

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[3] Hiam's husband is a doctor. He taught her to do the clinic's bookkeeping and to help him with other work-related tasks.

[4] The terms 'Arabs" or 'Palestinians in Israel" or 'Arab population" will be used interchangeably to represent the same population group unless indicated otherwise.

The educational opportunities open to Arab women have apparently contributed to greater expectations among young women. A study examining occupational expectations among Arab high school students in Israel vis-à-vis their future educational achievements showed that girls had higher expectations than boys. These expectations were more reasonable (the gap between expectations and achievements was smaller) and were appropriate to a reality in which women hold higher professional status than men (Khattab, 2003). Recent research shows that higher education leads to economic, not social, independence (Abu-Rabiea-Queder, 2008) and does not lead to macro changes in the state economy (Arar & Mustafa, 2009). The rise in educational level as well as economic constraints have led more Arab women to enter the work force, though the percentages are still low relative to Arab men and to Jewish women in Israel (Arar & Mustafa, 2009, Central Bureau of Statistics-CBS, 2005). The rates are higher among women who are college graduates; 62% of them work, often as teachers (CBS, 2005) and in nursing and social welfare (Araf-Bader, 1995; Azaiza, 2006; Khattab, 2002). Because Arab women who work tend to be relatively more educated than Arab men, their average income is also higher (Azaiza, 2006). Nonetheless, the number of women holding political and public positions is still low relative to their numbers in the population (Abu-Baker, 1998; Herzog & Bader-Araf, 2000). Israeli authorities kept Palestinian villages under-developed, a fact that contributed to the shortage of attractive employment settings for immobilized women (Abu-Baker, 2003b, Haj Yahia-Abu Ahmad, 2006).

Other researchers have proposed that studying and working outside the home has raised the self-esteem of Arab women, made them more independent, and led them to develop expectations typical of Western culture, such as self-fulfilment and gender equality. These changes have a number of implications for the Arab family (Cohen & Savaya, 2003). However, other research has emphasized that the spread of these changes is influenced by the type of ethnic group women live in (Abu-Rabiea-Queder, 2008).

Culture, social structure, tradition, religion and gender rules govern daily relationships between men and women. Despite social and cultural changes that occurred over the last three generations, in some areas traditional patterns have been preserved. For example, even though children of both genders are expected to do well in school, mothers of all generations have greater expectations of their daughters to acquire domestic skills than of their sons (Haj-Yahia Abu-Ahmad, 2006). In many cases, the

man is still considered the head of the family, and this affects how the children are raised and educated. Boys are taught to be strong and dominant, while girls are taught to be submissive and less dominant. Traditional values regarding relationships and gender roles reflect patriarchal perspectives (Haj-Yahia, 2000).

Studies focusing on the division of roles in the Arab family have revealed some interesting findings. Lavee & Katz (2003) reported that in more traditional families the roles in the family continue to be divided, with the men bearing instrumental responsibility for supporting and protecting the family, while the women are responsible for the home and the children. Traditional women from rural areas reported being more satisfied with the division of roles than urban women (Lavee & Katz, 2003), and couples in families with a definitive and unequal division of labour reported greater marital satisfaction compared to couples who equally divided the work between them (Lavee & Katz, 2002). Abu-Baker (2003b) and Kulik (2007) report a contrary finding, showing that women holding liberal viewpoints on gender roles and educated women were more satisfied with the equal type of division of labour at home. Kulik suggested that most of these women found educated partners who were willing to take on some of the household responsibilities, and Abu-Baker indicated that dissatisfaction in this aspect leads to marital problems. Lev-Wiesel and Al-Krenawi (1999) reported that education contributes to marital quality of life among Muslims and Christian. These findings, even though ostensibly contradictory, do indicate that couples should be compatible when it comes to education, values and expectations.

Gender differences in educational level, religion and the traditionalist-modernist continuum have diverse implications for the Arab family with respect to marital relations and marital satisfaction. Cohen and Savaya (2003a) relied upon claims in the literature that the inherent threat to the rights of Arab men posed by modernization leads to their attempt to relegate women to a submissive and inferior role. They suggested that this attempt increases the incompatibility between husband and wife and can even lead to violent behaviour by the husband (Cohen & Savaya, 2003a). In another study, differences in levels of tradition and religious observance were the most prevalent cause for not fulfilling the marriage contract among Muslim women, and some of these women claimed that differences in educational level constitute the basis of the gap in these areas (Cohen & Savaya, 2003b).

Methodology

Research Population

The research population were couples who met the following two criteria: (1) they have been married for at least 20 years and are still living together, and (2) at the time of their marriage, the difference in their educational levels was at least six years or two academic degrees.

Participants were sampled from all the geographical areas in which Palestinians reside in Israel, apart from the south.[5] The couples belonged to three religious groups: Muslims, Christians, and Druze.

Sample

Thirty-three couples were chosen (19 Muslim couples, 10 Christian couples and 4 Druze couples). The oldest couple had been married for 38 years. The couples were chosen from a variety of residential settings: large cities, medium-sized cities and small villages. With respect to geographic and religious attribution, the following sites were chosen: a Muslim city in the Galilee, a mixed city (Muslims and Christians) in the Galilee, two mixed villages in the Galilee (one with Muslims and Christians, and the other with Druze and Christians), a Muslim city in the Triangle region, and two Muslim villages in the Triangle region. A mixed Jewish-Arab city was also chosen, and Muslim and Christian women were interviewed there.

Sampling Methods

A. Suggestions made by professionals in the community (teachers, doctors, psychologists, social workers) who suggested couples they knew of, and were asked to act as mediators between the researchers and the couples. The mediators contacted the candidates and obtained their agreement in principle to participate in the study. They then gave the names and phone numbers to the researchers.
B. Snowball effect: The first couples to be interviewed provided the names and phone numbers of other candidate couples.

[5] For logistical reasons.

A list of names was prepared, and the first wave of candidates was chosen based upon geographic and religious distribution. Those who were not willing to cooperate were replaced by others on the list with similar characteristics.

Final number of Participants

By the end of the selection process, a total of 33 couples had been interviewed: 19 Muslim couples, 10 Christian couples and 4 Druze couples. Eight additional couples from the three religious groups agreed in principle to participate in the study but were unable to find time to be interviewed during the data collection period for personal reasons (illness, studying, children's examinations, vacations) or cultural reasons (Ramadan fast and other holidays). Two of the women interviewed and three of the men interviewed had spouses who refused to be interviewed. One man refused to involve his wife, claiming that he would report on her viewpoints, thus saving time both for her and for the researchers. Those in this category were interviewed on an individual basis to shed light on the status of declared problems.

Research Method

The study used the qualitative method and was based on in-depth interviews that took place in the interviewees' homes. The time and place of the interview were set at the convenience of each individual interviewee, who was alone in the room during the interview. On average, each interview ranged from an hour to an hour and a half. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in their entirety.

The interview was transcribed literally in the language of the interview—spoken Arabic. The interviewers themselves transcribed some of the interviews, and some were transcribed by two typists. All the interviewers and the typists signed confidentiality agreements to guarantee the privacy of the interviewees and ensure that all information they supplied would remain confidential.

The interviewers were four mental health professionals, all women with academic degrees (bachelor's or master's degree) who were experienced interviewers. An attempt to include a male interviewer was unsuccessful.

Research Instrument

The research tool was a structured open interview with two parts: demographic and content. The demographic questionnaire collected the following

information for each interviewee: age, education, university degrees, professions and occupations, age at engagement, age at marriage, number of children, age at birth of first child, age at birth of last child, and current economic situation.

The content was analyzed according to Dey's protocol (1993), which suggests that each researcher should subdivide the content into categories and analyze it according to themes. This analysis was carried out at least twice, at different times, by each of the two researchers. After that, the categories suggested by each researcher were compared. The extent of agreement between the two researchers in their division of the content into categories served as a basis for internal reliability.

Findings

Educational gaps in favour of the husbands

When the men in this study were asked about their feelings with respect to the educational gap between themselves and their wives, they all declared that it would have been better if the women could have achieved the same level of formal education. One interviewee with an engineering degree whose wife had only an eighth-grade education, summarized as follows: 'I very much wanted her to complete her matriculation exams, but her pregnancies were difficult and after that she let this idea drop'. The interviews indicate that this subject has indeed remained only as a declared intention. Not one of the male interviewees took any practical steps to help his wife complete her education and narrow the gap between them. It appears that, even educated men assume they should be better educated than their wives. Their response to the question conveys the impression that even being asked such a question is perplexing to them, for they assume this situation is 'natural' and as it should be.

The wives, for their part, devoted vigorous efforts to helping their husbands study and earn sought-after degrees. Thus they unconsciously contributed to building, widening, enhancing and preserving the existing gap. Wives who were with their husbands from the beginning of their studies helped them by relieving them of all responsibilities at home. The traditional division of labour in the Palestinian-Arab family provided strong support for this. Fawzi was 28 when he married Sumaya, a 17-year-old girl from his extended family. He had completed 12 years of schooling and was working in agriculture, and Sumaya had completed seventh grade. At the

time of their marriage, Arab agriculture was in a state of crisis, and Fawzi decided to get a college degree and become a teacher. At the time, he did not suggest that Sumaya finish high school. She was pregnant with their second child and busy raising their first child, and their financial situation was quite problematic. Later, when courses became available in the village for adults to complete their high school education, Sumaya felt she was too old for such a project. Fawzi describes the situation as follows:

> The truth is that she provided the perfect atmosphere at home for me to concentrate on my studies… During vacations from my studies or from work, I would close the door and cut myself off from the family and from society, each time for a period of weeks. That's how I finished all my academic obligations on time. She made this possible for me.

Sumaya therefore contributed to widening the gap in favour of her husband. After he completed his studies, Fawzi was promoted to vice principal, but Sumaya did not then expect her husband to clear the way for her or ask to complete her own education. Rather than feeling personal bitterness, Sumaya expressed great pride in her husband's achievements:

> He completed his BA and took many in-service courses offered by the Ministry of Education. He also took a course in administration. After that, he began studying for his MA, but he stopped when our children began attending university. He only needs a few more courses for his degree, but he made his children the first priority.

The following section discusses the educational development of wives as impacted by their marital relations with their husbands.

Educational gaps favouring the wives

In the current study, the women who were more educated than their spouses met their husbands at a relatively late age for marriage, and none of the husbands was related to his wife.[6] In 2007, the average age at marriage was 22.2 years for Muslim women, 23.1 years for Druze women and 25.1 years for Christian women (CBS, 2009). Women waiting for a match for several years tend to 'revise' their wish list of criteria for a husband each

[6] 35% of marriages among Palestinians in the Northern and Central regions, and up to 70% among Bedouin in the South, involved persons who were paternal or maternal relatives (Abu-Baker, forthcoming 2010).

year. Mona, for example, a preschool teacher by profession, was 27 when she met her husband Adham, who at the time was working at odd jobs.

Marriage to a partner of higher status than oneself has the potential to upgrade one's own social and economic status. The findings of the current study show that marrying a woman who is more educated provides the husband an opportunity for raising his own educational level. Educated women appear to take on closing the educational gap with their husbands as a project, and they do not stop until their husbands' education is equal, and in some cases superior, to their own.

The five women interviewed (out of a total of 33 in the sample) who were more educated than their husbands at the time of marriage described their extensive efforts to improve their husbands' education level, including helping them prepare for matriculation exams, taking on extra work to free their husbands of some of the obligation to support the family while pursuing a higher education, and recruiting the extended family to help the husbands find work commensurate with their newly acquired education. One example is Ketty, a Christian woman who met her husband Bashir when she was 24 and he was 26. She was about to complete her degree in medical science at the Hebrew University, while he had only finished ninth grade and was working in sales. Ketty claimed that the educational gap initially did not interfere with their marital relations and their everyday life at home, but began to get in the way when they started socializing with college-educated colleagues who worked in various fields of medicine, particularly when these friends began to use words in English in their social discourse. Ketty explains:

> Of course there is a gap between someone who is educated and someone who is not… I always wanted him to finish his education, and I always felt his lack of education was a weak point for me.… When our relationship began to develop, I was not aware of the impact of these gaps. I encouraged him. After he finished his degree I felt our social status had changed. I am educated and so is my husband.

Ketty helped Bashir finish his matriculation exams, register for technical engineering school and complete his studies with the help of a private teacher. When he completed his associate degree as a practical engineer, he began working on projects for one of the local government authorities. Ketty refers to him as an 'engineer' in his field.

In the next section, we analyze the various strategies adopted by husbands and wives in their attempts to close the educational gaps between them.

Gender differences in Strategies for Closing Educational Gaps

A. *Couple's Reaction when Husbands are More Educated*

Comparing the responses of the more educated husbands to those of the more educated wives indicates that each gender assigns a differential weight to education. Men and women adopt different strategies for closing the gaps in accordance to social and cultural expectations of each gender group with respect to marriage.

Fuad completed his medical studies after his marriage, in Europe, while his wife, who had a BA degree when they married, put her career on hold and did whatever simple work came her way in order to support them. After returning to Israel, he completed another medical specialty and a sub-specialty, while his wife was busy with pregnancies, raising the children and returning to the workforce. Even though the wife had been more educated than her husband when they got married, after 23 years of marriage there was a 13-year educational gap between his education and professional training and that of his wife. She never continued her education after completing her academic studies, while he still attends professional workshops and seminars in his field, at home and abroad.

Twenty-eight women out of the 33 sampled were less educated than their husbands at the time of marriage. These women can be divided into two categories: women with an elementary school education and women with a high school education. The findings show the lower the wives' education, the more they preferred to invest their efforts in taking care of the home and raising the children, while at the same time being 'more enabling' with respect to their husbands' education and professional advancement. Yet describing the behaviour of this group of women as 'enabling' or 'inhibiting' is not customary because blind spots can lead to gender deviation in the views and values of the observers. A close look at the world of this group of women shows that some of them chose to work in manual jobs, such as agriculture, to finance their husbands' studies, and they saw themselves as full partners to their husbands' success. They never used patriarchal expressions such as 'I enabled him' or 'I permitted him' or 'I allowed him'. Instead they used phrases such as 'I helped him', 'I supported him' and 'I freed him from worrying about the house and the children'. Such phrases constitute the female means of expressing a sense of mission and partnership.

With respect to completing their own education, these women claim there is no point now. Rather, their efforts are invested in providing opportunities for their sons and daughters to pursue a higher education. This trend goes along with the collectivist approach in the Arab family, according to which every task or achievement is the responsibility, property and accomplishment of the collective.

These women take particular pride in themselves compared to other women of similar educational background whose husbands are not educated, and they consider themselves fortunate in their lot. Despite feeling that they are partners to their husbands' education, they gave no responses indicating any objections to the gender-based division of labour and authority in the patriarchal family.

The second group of women comprises those who had already finished high school at the time of marriage. These women pursued three distinct general directions: some learned a trade, some went on to pursue a higher education, and some took no additional educational steps. All began fulfilling their desire to continue their education and improve their self-image by taking short courses offered by the local government authority. Some took courses in bookkeeping, hair styling, cosmetics, sewing, computers and preschool education.[7] But as their husbands' status and income rose, so too did their objections to their wives working in their chosen professions. The husbands tended to consider their wives' studies as a form of 'occupational therapy' for women who were bored, disappointed and frustrated, and suffered from low self-esteem. The economic value of working in the fields offered to these women is quite low relative to the long work hours and to their husbands' income. The husbands feared that their wives would harm their own professional and financial prestige in the eyes of the other village residents. When some of these women insisted on working in their field (bookkeeping, for example), their husbands belittled the value of the profession and its financial contribution to the family, and they made their wives feel that they were neglecting the home and the family. Thus directly or indirectly, they blocked their wives from becoming professional and independent. This cognitive dissonance led these women to formulate declarations such as, 'I studied for my personal enjoyment and to help my children when necessary'. After taking a long and varied list of short courses, two of the women interviewed, who were particularly ambi-

[7] See quotes from Hiam's lecture at the beginning of this paper.

tious and whose husbands were well-established, began pursuing academic studies outside the village, one after 18 years of marriage and the other after 22 years.

For men pursuing academic studies, the prevailing conditions enable them to devote all their time after work to studying. In such a case, the woman's job is to free her husband 'of all worries and not to burden him'. On the other hand, women who went on to pursue academic studies did not expect their husbands to free up time or change their agendas to take over some of their wives' household duties and family responsibilities in order to enable them to concentrate on their studies. These women first had to meet all their traditional obligations before allowing themselves to pursue their studies.

B. *Reactions when Wives are More Educated*

While husbands, wives and society at large see educational gaps in favour of the husbands as 'natural' and a 'non-issue', there is a social mechanism that regulates educational inequality detrimental to the husband. Thus, the man himself, his wife and his original family all emphasize and promote other attributes of the husband in an attempt to balance the picture on his behalf. In such cases, attempts are made to diminish the importance of the wife's formal education while stressing the importance of the husband's general education or social intelligence. Dina, a woman from the Triangle area with a master's degree, described her husband Rashid, who had finished the ninth grade and was working in a garage at the time of their marriage: 'He is very intelligent, he loves to read, he has amazing knowledge in many areas, he gets along with everyone, even better than I do'. Dina persistently asked Rashid to take a management course for automobile electronics garages. She encouraged him to finish high school and hired a private tutor to help him understand the theoretical materials. After he successfully completed the course, she pressed him to open his own garage to increase their income and improve his professional and social standing, and even took out a loan to finance this endeavour.

Another example is Vivian, a Christian woman from a mixed city (Jews and Arabs) who met her husband Emile through his sister. When they met, she held a bachelor's degree from the Israel Institute of Technology and a university teaching certificate, while he had completed the tenth grade at a vocational school. When she decided to marry him, a number of her relatives urged her not to agree to the match because Emile did not

have a college degree and did not come from a wealthy family. Vivian did not heed their advice, and after her marriage, she took on furthering Emile's education as her most important project. At the time he was working in maintenance at the city hall. After six years, with the encouragement of his wife and his department manager at work, he was finally registered for a night course to complete his matriculation certificate. Vivian spent hours helping him study and prepare for exams. After he successfully finished these studies, she convinced him to study bookkeeping. Despite difficulties, he managed to complete bookkeeping certification. His wife again urged him to continue studying, and he completed a course in human resources management, which enabled him to be promoted to a management position. Becoming a municipal clerk was a source of pride for him and those around him. Vivian said it was important for him to get an education so he would not feel like an 'outsider' among her friends and their husbands, all of whom were college educated. During the interview, she stressed a number of times that her husband's intelligence and knowledge surpassed that of everyone else in their circle of friends and that she wanted him to get an academic degree 'for himself and his own peace of mind'. While he was studying, her family encouraged him and even gave him financial support so he could complete his studies.

Men who seek women more educated than they are tend to do so as an investment in their social mobility and that of their future children. Adham was one of ten children of hard-working and indigent parents, none of whom had finished high school; he managed to complete ten years of schooling and worked at many odd jobs. When he was unemployed, he took a course to become an air conditioner technician, a profession that enabled him work independently and improve his financial situation. He stated that he purposefully planned to marry a woman who was more educated than himself in order to give his children the educational opportunities he never had. He married Mona, a preschool teacher. Adham also set down his conditions with respect to their educational gap, so that his wife could not use the gap as a reason to feel superior:

> I contribute a great deal to my wife's professional life. I have lots of life experience, I've worked inside many homes, in hospitals and in social welfare offices, I've seen a lot. Therefore I give her effective advice. In 90% of the cases, I'm sure she benefits from my advice.

While women separate themselves from their husbands' professional world, educated women involve their husbands in all the details of their professions. This tendency was apparent among all the women who were more educated than their husbands. They involved their husbands in their daily schedule, the nature of their profession and the dynamics of human relations at their place of work. They even enlisted their husbands' help in solving problems at work or in travelling to workshops. Here's what Adham has to say about this:

> She never belittled me because I am not educated, and when I made a mistake she never said it was because of my lack of education or because I'm illiterate or because I don't understand.... I tried to make it with my own business three times and failed..... She told me, 'You be responsible for our financial affairs' even though we have a joint bank account. She didn't want me to feel she was giving me money... The truth is that she brings in more money than I do but she refuses to keep the money.... She shows her appreciation socially and in front of our friends and family.

A comparison of the behaviour of educated women to that of educated men with respect to continued education for the less-educated spouse reveals the following:

1. Women who are less educated tend to encourage their educated husbands to continue their education and to facilitate the conditions to make this possible, while men who are less educated do not adopt a similar approach. One major reason is differences in status between the two genders, causing men to be suspicious of further increasing the gap. The other reason is the traditional gender division of labour. Educated women who are married and have children are not free to continue investing in their own educational and professional development. Yet when asked to describe the situation, men do not take responsibility for their wives' burden. In the best of cases, they attempt to sympathize with their wives. Adham describes this situation as follows:

> I want her to keep on studying. But because she is responsible for the home and the children, she can't. I admit I don't help out at home.... I think she's under a lot of pressure. I'm proud of her and of how she is handling this burden... I thank God for giving me what I wanted. I told you, I wanted an educated woman for the benefit of my children.

2. Women who cannot pursue further studies are in effect blocked from professional advancement. The women interviewed avoided attributing blame to any particular cause, such as traditional division of gender roles or a lack of cooperation on the part of their husbands and children. Instead, they described the situation as a given. Mona, Adham's wife, described how she was prevented from professional advancement:

> I was one of the first preschool teachers in my city… It's difficult for me to travel to in-service training courses in distant locations. It's hard for me to leave my children…. I've abandoned the idea of becoming a senior teacher. In effect I've given up the salary raise I would get as a senior teacher.

The phrase 'to leave my children' expresses feelings of anxiety and over-protectiveness toward her children. This is apparently a polite and socially acceptable form of sublimation, another way of using cognitive dissonance to describe the traditional division of the burden of house and children that does not leave women time to develop professionally. Furthermore, this discourse reflects a situation of 'learned helplessness' typical of dominated minority groups, including Palestinian women in Israel.

C. *Enhancing and emphasizing certain qualities*

Women adopted additional strategies to blur the gaps in education. They enhanced the importance of their husbands' professional abilities and attributed additional weight to existing qualities, such as emotional intelligence or social ties with important people, using this strategy to join a more prestigious social circle or achieve higher status. Zina, a Muslim high school teacher who married a barber with a ninth-grade education, stated, 'I was surprised to discover who Ryad's friends were! They were all educated people with college degrees. True, he didn't attend college but he is very intelligent, reads a lot, goes to lectures. He attended the school of life and is very curious. He has many wonderful qualities'. No similar trend was apparent among the men. For the most part, men who are more educated than their wives praise them as 'tolerant', 'satisfied with their lot', 'devoted mothers' and 'excellent homemakers'. These descriptions are powerful in that they reflect the existing reality while at the same time contributing to reconstructing that reality, for the women indeed perceived these descriptions as praise rather than as a means of gender control.

Another difference in style between the two genders in closing educational gaps is the matter of 'visibility' as opposed to 'abstention' in social

life. Women who are more educated than their husbands made sure their husbands had a chance to stand out at family gatherings and on social and professional occasions to give them status and a sense of being the patriarch. When a particular social network did not give the husband the proper attention or did not include him as his wife's equal, the couple cut off their connections with this particular network so as not to cause the husband distress. In contrast, educated men decided themselves whether or not to include their wives in certain events. They declared themselves to be liberated men who 'permit their wives to join them on important occasions'. In effect they expected their wives to be silent and invisible partners.

Discussion

The results of the current study indicate that as a result of educational gaps between husbands and wives, patriarchal structure in marital relations and in family values are preserved. When the husband is the more educated partner at the time of marriage, he establishes the tone of the relationship by relating to his wife as a homemaker responsible for raising the children, and sometimes even asks her to limit her expenses, or to find work, so he can finish higher education studies. Husbands view their studies as a long-term investment for their own social and economic status, which will bring benefits to the entire family. These findings support those of Lavee and Katz, who claimed that Arab men still maintain instrumental roles and therefore preserve the traditional division of labour (Lavee & Katz, 2003).

Palestinian couples in Israel who have been married more than twenty years typically met through arranged marriages. The mechanism of arranged marriages gives men and women the opportunity to meet and to negotiate, either directly or through representatives of the extended family, aspects of their future relationship. Yet by its very nature the mechanism of arranged marriages reinforces and reproduces existing parameters; these parameters arose out of patriarchal society, and they preserve patriarchy. In Palestinian and other Arab communities, women from the three religions marry "up", meaning marry men who are older than them, and who have higher educational, social and employment levels. Educational levels among women differ; but our findings show that despite this variation, women help reproduce patriarchal patterns in their marital lives for an array of declared or silent reasons.

Melville and Infeld Keller (1988) explain that women tend to marry men who surpass them with respect to certain attributes, such as age, education, income and social status, so that they can marry when they are younger, have healthier children and provide their children with the optimal resources for survival. They claim that this tendency is universal, but as society begins to divide roles more equitably between the genders, this equation has begun to show signs of cracking (Neckerman, 2004). Kalmijin (1991) refers to equal education level among spouses as confirmation of the popularity of achievement mechanisms. This study concludes that academic education for pioneering women two decades ago did not elevate them to a superior lifestyle, to better employment circumstances, higher quality marriages or gender equality. On the contrary, when this group in our study reached the age of 24 without being married, they had to accept compromises because marriage in Arab society is universal (Abu-Baker, 2007; Barakat, 2000). The result in cases involving these educated woman was that the husband played a new patriarchal role; he found ways to close the educational and economic gaps and allow him to lead the marital relationship, especially in the public and economic spheres. These dynamics, which developed as a new barrier against women, are causes that defer gender equality.

According to the literature, education and occupation are a major impetus for social mobility among Arab women (Abu-Baker, 1985, 1998, 2003b, 2008; Abu-Rabiea-Queder, 2008; Arar & Abu-Asba, 2007). Until the 1980s, there were no high schools in most Arab villages in Israel (Al-Haj, 1996), and this influenced whether girls from traditional families would continue their studies. The victims of this reality did not blame the government but rather the family patriarch (father, grandfather or brother), for he was the one who directly forbade them from going to high school in a neighbouring city.

Barakat (2000) claims that during the 20th century the Arab family went through structural and normative changes. Fargness (1996) claims that in the 1970s and 1980s, signs of changing marital patterns in the Arab world became obvious, and towards the end of the 20th century, these changes became more widespread. One reason is that modern values began to be adopted, leading to changes in the family structure, more education for women, postponement of marriage until a later age and a drop in the number of marriages among relatives. As a result, the percentage of single women in the population rose (Sa'ar, 2000). Similar changes took place among Palestinian women in Israel (Abu-Baker, 2007). These changes

paved the way for men to marry women who were more educated than they were; this changed the pattern of women marrying "up". Sa'ar (2000) interpreted such marital conditions as the only option for many Arab women to marry and have a family before being relegated to the social framework known in Arabic as *A'anes*, the equivalent of 'old maid'.

Self-esteem of educated Arab women is influenced by several parameters other than higher education. These include marriage and rearing children. According to Lewin (2004), demographic gaps between numbers of men and women alter trends of marriage with a younger man, but do not influence marriages involving less educated men. Choo and Siow (2006) claim that education is one of the social parameters taken into consideration on the marriage market, while Bukodi and Robert (2003) refer to equal education as the most important factor in the achievement of a homogenous marriage. Indeed, if education could be converted on the marriage market, it would be assigned a real value. Age, on the other hand, is a valued resource among Arab women so long as they remain within the young age range for marriage (17–23). After that, age begins to impose the threat that they will miss the opportunity to marry and have children. To prevent this threat from being realized, educated women who have not yet married lower criteria for choosing a husband, including consent to marry men who do not have a high school education. Cohen and Savaya (2003) suggested that for Arab women, studying and working outside the home raised their self-esteem and their feelings of independence, causing them to develop expectations identified with Western culture, such as self-fulfilment and gender equality. They even expected that these changes would have an impact on Arab families in a number of areas. This obtained self-esteem was damaged the longer the group of women stayed unmarried, causing social regression to new forms of patriarchy based on women's attitudes toward men's leadership and self-esteem.

The patriarchal approach was also not undermined when the educational gaps were in favour of the wife. Due to social pressure and the desire to preserve their marriages, these women provided their husbands with conditions that would place them in the position of family patriarch, silently reproducing traditional gender roles in exchange for gaining 'a family'. This trend is compatible with Kulik (2007), who found that Muslim women tend to preserve traditional gender role patterns when it comes to household tasks. We found this trend among Druze and Christian women as well (See also Sa'ar, 2001; Shahar & Meir (1998); Weiner-Levy, 2006). We believe that these same results exist in all socioeconomic groups

as a result of the refusal of Arab patriarchs to take part of what is known as "traditional women's tasks". One can conclude that changes have occurred in one aspect of modernization, such as education, which was forced by the state; however, patriarchal society did not internalize the fundamental nature of these changes. The specific changes did not reflect immediately on gender equality and did not cause changes in women's concepts of self-esteem and gender roles. Sixty years later, despite the fact that the latest statistics reveal that the number of female graduates from high schools, colleges and universities exceeds the numbers of males, Palestinian society still relates to women's education as an option, not as a necessity (Abu-Baker, forthcoming, 2010). Also, Okun and Friedlander (2005) noted that Muslim women in Israel have made more rapid advances in educational achievements than Muslim men. Due to the strong influence of patriarchal norms, these changes decreased the value of women's education, instead of functioning as a lift for gender equality.

Yet a small group of educated women, more than any other, claims that women's education implements a division of labour between husband and wife and a type of discourse that predicts a breakthrough of sorts toward equal relations. This observation matches the assessment of emerging tendencies toward change in these patterns Azaiza (2004) and Abu-Baker's arguments that changes are indeed occurring. Nevertheless these changes are eclectic, vary in accordance with the given context, and their value changes according to the patriarchal jurisdiction and context at that time (Abu-Baker, 1998, 2003b).

Traditions, social norms and gender roles and historical separation between private vs. public sphere, encouraged women to compete among themselves, not with men. The current study shows that women and men had enhanced self-esteem when men had college education and were respected at work and in society. Women's education makes them feel valuable and independent compared to other women around them who lack extensive education. On the other hand, their husbands' lower educational levels contributed to their lower self-esteem. We believe that the patriarchal values and the traditional agenda, which continue to have an impact on women who are pioneers as educated people, prevent them from converting their unique human capital, such as their education, into new forms of marital, family and social ties (Abu-Baker, 1998). Pioneer academic women, unlike pioneer academic men, did not utilize their academic education to reach key jobs because social and economic conditions did not allow this to take place. Instead, they followed the traditional gendered

expectations by alternating their energy in promoting their husbands' education and career and by fulfilling traditional gender jobs such as house chores and rearing children.

It is assumed that educated men in changing societies act as social agents who promote modernization in women's lives: pursuing education, improved employment possibilities, participation in politics, and reduction in family size (Lerner, 1958; Schramm, 1964). The type of modernization Palestinians in Israel adopted is similar to what Hisham Sharabi describes as "New Patriarchy". Borrell et al. (2004) claim that modernization promotes processes of social and psychological well being. Modernization processes have been adopted by Palestinian families in Israel in differing fashions, as a result of varying family structures and norms (Haj-Yahia Abu Ahmad, 2006; Khshiboun, 1997). The results of our study contradicts this assumption. Most educated Palestinian men, who belonged to the first generation in their communities that had access to higher education degrees, chose women who were available for marriage from their extended family, from their own social status and younger than them. This study, in addition to Mari'e and Daher, (1976, in Al-Haj, 1996), shows that the percentage of females in the educational system (elementary and high school) were 18% in 1948, 38% in 1970 and 48% in 1991 which means that men could not find female graduate students who dropped their education at early stages. Men with advanced degrees continued investing in their own education and career, leaving their wives to live as traditional women: the women remained mostly illiterate, raised numerous children, took care of the household, tended to the well-being of their husbands and sometimes took paid jobs in order to promote their husbands education and career. Not one of the participant men in this study encouraged his wife to engage in any program for continued education. Despite the fact that a few of them work in influential jobs in the ministry of education and some are publicists (both wives had elementary education), they played the double role of promoting gender equality ideas in the public sphere, while promoting renewed patriarchial lifestyles in their private sphere. This group believed that the wives have 'social compensation' by being married to these men and 'psychological compensation' by joining their husbands from time to time to their conferences or work trips. Men and women, in this group compared the lifestyle of these women to women their age and their level of education in other households where their husbands are not educated. Furthermore, women in this group felt that their children are lucky because their father's education allows them better opportunities to pursue their

academic education, again in comparison with families where fathers are not educated. This is clear and thought-provoking evidence that educated Palestinian men in Israel are not carrying out their jobs as social agents, while on the other hand women have chosen not to fight for social and gender equality.

This study also shows that when one aspect of modernity, such as education for women, goes hand in hand with new forms of patriarchy, it harms women's sense of well-being (see also, Abu-Baker, 2008; Aburabia-Queder, 2008). We assume that women who succeeded to be the first in their community to obtain higher education degrees experienced psychological and cultural change. Had they gone through a social change as well? Literature on these psycho-cultural changes underscores the intensity of the impact of modernization in the life of Arab women (see for example Moghadam, 1993) especially with regard to the question of the limitations of power and the subject of agency of change open for women (Butler, 1993; 1997).

Butler (1993; 1997) suggests two ways women cope with oppression in their lives: conformism or conflict. Cohen and Savaya, (2003a) find that modernization threatens Palestinian men in Israel, and that increased incompatibility between husband and wife can lead to violent behaviour by the husband. Our study shows that Palestinian women in Israel are practical partners in designing cultural and social change. However, they—as individuals, not as a collective—contribute to social change within the boundaries of tradition (see also, Abu-Baker, 2008). We believe that educated women, who suppressed their visibility as leaders in their communities in an attempt to avoid stirring feelings of inferiority among their husbands, acted under the psychosocial influence of the patriarchal oppression of women—a type of violence hard to identify and distinguish because it is shaped by the social and cultural atmosphere of a person's milieu. As Palestinian women attain advanced higher education degrees, it becomes harder for them to find a good match for marriage (Ardrich, 2010; Halehel, 2008) mainly because Arab men have not internalized the idea of marrying equal partners.

The political and national oppression of Palestinians in Israel following the establishment of the State in 1948 has influenced the Palestinian minority's socio-political agenda. Leadership (national, political, cultural and social) prioritise conflicts and confrontation, giving the prerogative to the struggle against oppression and discrimination. Palestinian leaders, like other leaders in Arab countries that had been under occupation, believe

that social reform, including gender reform, can be reached only after national liberation (Abu-Baker, 1998). This set of priorities, designated by men, governs the agenda of change within Palestinian society in Israel.

Limitations on work opportunities and economic development open to Palestinians in Israel have left men in control of limited resources, and they choose whether to allow or deny women access to these scarce resources (Abu-Baker, 1998, 2003). The Palestinian population has so far failed in its battle for national equal rights, and the only battle that can be won is that of the patriarchy in the family and society. Alhaidari (2003) cites three reasons hindering the development of Arab women in Arab societies: (1) The patriarchal approach in society and family, (2) social and ethnic stratification and (3) the marginalization of the Non- Governmental Organizations that challenge constitutional, religious and traditional norms. We believe that these reasons apply also to the case of Palestinians in Israel.

Although Christian women were generally able to pursue high school and academic education as a result of the free education offered by Christian denominations that arrived to Palestine since the middle of the seventeenth century (Abu-Baker, 1998), this study found that Christian marital norms and gender roles were comparable to those of Muslim and Druze women. This means that Arabic culture and traditions, influenced by Islam, have been the dominant factor impacting family and social relationships and norms among Palestinians in Israel.

Final Conclusions

In addition to the findings reported in the paper, we wish to underscore the following conclusions:

Arab culture allows men, but not women, to emphasize educational gaps with their spouses. We conclude that women learn that it is not worthwhile to emphasize educational gaps, lest they stir adverse reactions: social, psychological, economic or otherwise.

Embedded changes that have taken place in the Arab family and in society are mainly instrumental, not normative. This is congruent with other research studies that found that higher education leads to economic, not social, independence (Abu-Rabiea-Queder, 2008) and does not lead to macro changes in the state economy (Arar & Mustafa, 2009). Since Palestinian society in Israel is, on average, an economically disadvantaged soci-

ety (more than 50% of the population lives under the poverty line, CBS, 2009), it is not surprising that both men and women in our study value working women who contribute to the family's finances. We found that uneducated working women who brought in an income were more highly valued than educated women who did not work and thus did not contribute to the family budget.

The psychosocial tendency of Arab individuals to view the family (the collective) rather than the individual as the relational unit (Barakat, 2000) helps uneducated women view their husbands' educational achievements as their own. Barakat claims that collective norms dominate in Arab society. These norms construct the building blocks of conformism towards the collective. The collective forces individuals to suppress their desires and consent to widening gaps between the private and public. Women, more than men, suffer mainly because the collective expects them to be more repressive of their own needs compared to men (Barkat, 2000).Very strict historical gender divisions have essentially created two separate groups: men and women, each with its own norms, expectations and even lifestyle. Therefore, women who feel unfulfilled because they did not complete their academic education see other women in their surroundings who did succeed in this project as role models, while they do not consider educated men as their role models. These pioneering women are considered spearheads, mentors and leaders of social change as long as social and marital conditions allow that to happen.

Continuing education programs offered to women inside their communities rarely reflect occupational needs in the labour market. Therefore, women's efforts in these courses are not considered as oriented toward goals of economic or educational promotion. In comparison, courses offered to men are utilized immediately for occupational, economic and social progress. Women's education should not be considered occupational therapy, and policy-makers and officials should take steps to make it more career-oriented.

The sample in this study was couples who had been married for at least twenty years. This means that their lives have been greatly influenced by the norms that controlled family, culture and society prior to their marriage. This study gave us the narrative of the path of education each participant chose or was forced to choose, and its impact on the marital relationship, as a result of the educational gap. The qualitative methodology of this study, despite the limited number participants, offered rich

information regarding history, social stratification, gender relations and marital norms. We believe that aspects of these stories reflect the experience of other Palestinian men and women in Israel, and we suggest that these findings be used as complementary to other statistical findings in quantitative studies.

Finally, we suggest that a similar research initiative be carried out among couples who have been married for a decade or less, and among recently wed couples, in order to examine changes that have occurred in recent years.

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