

According to a study by researchers at four British universities, for each 15-point increase in IQ, the likelihood of getting married increases by around 35% for a man but decreases by around 58% for a woman. Why?

The determinants of marriage have changed with time, but an important question that remains unsolved is the role of IQ in both males and females and how it impacts the selection of a partner. Under the binary gender system, followed by the majority of countries worldwide, gender norms play a key role in determining how people function in society. Due to the patriarchy of the traditional societal systems, roles in a marriage are assigned in a format wherein conformity to gender norms is a given.

Gender norms themselves have a drastic effect on the perception of IQ differences between men and women. Though there is no statistically significant difference between the average IQ scores of men and women, a study conducted by Szymanowicz and Furnham (2013) found that in self-estimates of IQ, the male gender was positively correlated with perceived cognitive and intellectual ability whereas the female gender was related to “soft” personal skills. This itself highlights the norms associated with each gender wherein men are perceived to be more intelligent, honing intellectual skills that are useful for financial and economic functions whereas women are prescribed abilities that are useful for homemaking and raising a family. Hence, IQ scores can determine the extent to which a woman conforms to her assigned role in society, impacting how she is perceived specifically as a suitable partner for marriage as men may prefer women who meet the requirements outlined by gender norms in order to maintain their positions in society. The relationship between the two can find explanations in several areas of psychological research including evolutionary and socio-cultural perspectives.

However, at the same time, IQ and education themselves act as facilitators for breaking down traditional gender roles. They provide a means through which women can better understand the construct of marriage and evaluate the role of a woman within it. Education also provides women with further opportunities in terms of career building and financial independence, reducing their tendency to depend on marriage and a husband for economic security. This essay examines the psychological and anthropological factors involved in the relationship between IQ and the likelihood of marriage in men and women.

Evolutionary Perspectives

From an evolutionary perspective, we can evaluate the influence of IQ on a woman's decision to marry through the Parental Investment Theory which as defined by Robert Trivers in 1972 explains the relationship between the costs of producing offspring and the reproductive payoffs that are attained through these investments. This essentially suggests that a sex that invests more into their offspring will be more selective when it comes to choosing a partner. Women bear the greater brunt of parental investments as they have costlier gamete production, gestation and lactation hence the investment they make into their offspring is measured in years rather than in minutes as it is for men. Women therefore evolved to be more selective in mate choice, prioritising traits such as stability and resource availability. As dictated by gender norms, Higher IQ in men is associated with greater earning potential hence making them more attractive partners.

Conversely, we can better understand the appeal of a lower IQ in women through the sexual selection theory which through a Darwinian mindset suggests that certain traits in individuals are preferred as they signal genetic fitness. Hence, men seeking to maximise their reproductive success prefer traits such as physical attractiveness and youth as compared to IQ. Societal norms suggest that these qualities are essential for child rearing which, as per gender roles, is the primary purpose of a woman therefore making them more suitable partners.

Fragile Social Identities

We can further analyse the results of this study through the lens of fragile social identities. When young boys or men are extrinsically motivated to conform to gender norms- rather than intrinsically motivated - they rely on others' evaluations of them to form their own impressions about their manhood. This pressure to conform to abounding roles of masculinity, such as being the leader of one's family, may cause the development of fragile male identities. I consider this masculinity to be fragile as unlike secure identities (intrinsically motivated), when their manhood is challenged or questioned a norm reaffirming threat response is evoked.

Manhood as compared to womanhood is culturally viewed to be in a precarious state as it needs to be defended, through norm reaffirming actions, in this case marrying a suitable partner. This 'manhood' can be lost by the

simple act of showing even the most minimal amounts of weakness or straying away from a traditional gender role which is why it needs to be constantly proved. The sense of masculinity gained is once again one that is fragile. Its nature being elusive in the sense of obtainment, it is more than just a physical and biological transition, gaining one's manhood is a status that is earned through a social pathway, because this 'status' can be lost easily through minor social transgressions, its nature is tenuous as well. This precariousness of manhood stems from 'evolved adaptations' in a social setting and social roles abounding competitiveness, defensiveness and public proof of success often involve men who strive to attain this status in society.

In the context of marriage, traditional norms suggest that men should be the leaders of the household. They should be in charge of making key decisions and controlling financial resources. Furthermore, the expectation of men to be the primary breadwinners of households is a cornerstone of the traditional view of masculinity. The role of providing for the family reinforces a man's status and control within a household and high IQ in men specifically is associated with better educational and professional opportunities. The sense of emasculation that triggers their fragile social identities arises when men perceive that their traditional masculine roles are being threatened or overshadowed. Women with high IQs, who surpass their intelligence or career success, create competitive and comparative dynamics within a marriage wherein men may feel that their ability to fill the expected role is undermined leading to feelings of inadequacy. A woman's employment causes non-conformity to gender roles specialisation within the marriage, which is a noted cause of discomfort and conflict within marriages. To compensate for these emotions, men engage in norm reaffirming responses by choosing to marry women with lower IQs who pose a smaller threat to their masculine identities.

Social Learning Theories

The social cognitive theory (an extension of the social learning theory) is an examination of how norms are transmitted between members of a group. It suggests that learning of behaviours can be an indirect process wherein we learn by observing the consequences of another person's actions. It suggests that identification is one of the most significant mechanisms that modulate whether a behaviour can be learned or not. Identification essentially states that learning can be enhanced with and if the learner can identify with the model they're learning from. Hence gender norms are similarly perpetuated as individuals, especially from a young age, identify with the model and behaviours of same-gender adults. Boys observe the norm that intelligence and

financial success are desirable traits while girls observe that domestic roles are valued. Social reinforcement strengthens these norms as they are demonstrated by other members of society. This internalisation of norms can hence influence marriage decisions in both men and women.

The Role of Education

Additionally, education is a key factor that modulates the decision to marry. Education gives individuals the resources with which they can better understand and evaluate the roles of gender biases and stereotypes in society. More educated women (with higher IQs) may themselves reject the traditional social expectations of early marriage and childbirth and choose to carve out new paths for themselves. Educated women are also more exposed to resources including those of family planning which will allow them to have greater control and insight into their reproductive choices which in turn may affect their decision to marry.

One of the most significant benefits of higher education is the prospect of financial independence for a woman. Women with higher IQs are more likely to have the skill sets required for well-paying jobs and successful professional careers. This reduces the economic necessity for marriage and dependence on a man as a breadwinner for financial security hence giving women more freedom to choose when and if they marry.

From a primary research study that I conducted, which aimed to analyse the relationship between female participation in economic activity and rising divorce/separation rates in an urban city of India, Mumbai through a questionnaire and Qualitative Content Analysis (including both a Narrative and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach) it was observed that 8 out of 12 participants (Indian women between the ages of 25 and 75, from varying socio-economic backgrounds, who are either divorced or separated from their partners) believed that financial independence has been a source of stability providing them with confidence (in their personal decision making) and freedom (in the actions that they take and decisions that they choose to make) to stand on their own two feet, leading successful and healthy lives without being married. For example, respondent number 7 defined financial independence as “being able to stand up for myself without being scared of consequences and having the freedom to make my own decisions”.

In conclusion, the relationship between IQ, gender norms and marital choices is complex and deeply influenced by both evolutionary and socio-cultural factors. Historically, partner selection has been dictated by traditional gender roles wherein higher IQ in men is associated with economic stability and lower IQ in women is associated with success in domestic roles. However, in modern society, these roles are being challenged with higher education and financial independence, facilitated by higher IQ, empowering women to break out of traditional moulds allowing greater autonomy in their decisions regarding marriage. Men in particular experience fragility in their manhood and masculinity feeling a greater threat by partners with higher IQs due to perceived challenges to their traditional roles (breadwinners of the household). Furthermore, social learning theories suggest how norms are perpetuated across generations. It is essential to note the spread of education which prompts the evolution of societal attitudes, weakening gender biases and hence paving the way for more egalitarian relationships.