

She's more educated than her husband and that's okay

Women no longer need to marry up as gender roles, expectations change, says don

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Patricia is a university graduate who earns about three times more than her husband does. He is an army regular with a diploma.

She holds a highly specialised professional job, which she declines to name, that pays her well. Both of them are 36 years old.

Patricia (not her real name) said the differences between their educational levels and income were not a concern at all for her.

"Our chemistry is more important. It's how we click and hit it off. If you want true love, you have to look past these superficial things," she said.

The couple, who met through a dating app, tied the knot last month after dating for five years.

Like Patricia, more women here are marrying men who are less educated than them.

A total of 5,157 women who wed last year had higher educational qualifications than their grooms – an 8 per cent increase from the 4,768 such women who tied the knot in 2011.

The share of marriages involving a woman who is better educated than her husband was 18.2 per cent of all marriages last year, up from 17.5 per cent in 2011.

Meanwhile, fewer grooms are better educated than their wives.

The proportion of grooms with brides who have lower educational qualifications than them fell from 16.3 per cent of marriages in

2011 to 12.3 per cent last year.

Of the men who married last year, 3,479 of them have higher educational qualifications than their wives – 22 per cent less than the 4,445 such men who wed in 2011.

However, most couples have similar educational levels. Of the couples who wed last year, 69.5 per cent fell into this category, up from 66.2 per cent in 2011.

The Department of Statistics highlighted the educational differential upon marriage in the Statistics on Marriages and Divorces 2021 report published on July 6.

Singapore Management University sociology professor Paulin Straughan said that under a patriarchal system, it was more acceptable for a woman to marry a man who was more educated, more established in his career or who had a higher socio-economic status than herself – known as marrying up.

And a man – who was traditionally the head of the household and breadwinner – would typically marry a woman with an equal or lower educational level than himself. But gender roles and expectations are changing, she noted.

Prof Straughan said: "Now we see the gap closing as women are more educated and more capable, and... don't need to marry to gain social mobility."

Other experts interviewed said the number of female university graduates rose significantly in the past decade and half of the resident population aged 25 and older with university qualifications last year were women.

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This has led to more men marrying women with similar educational levels and fewer men with a less educated wife, they said.

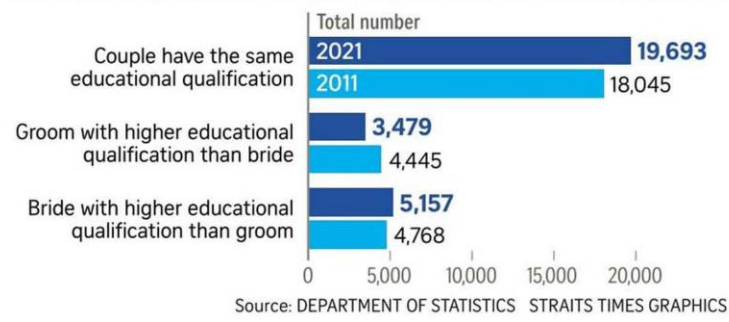
However, educational qualifications may not necessarily be a good indicator of income, and income is still a key concern for Singaporeans when selecting partners, those interviewed pointed out.

Ms Alicia Boo, principal counsellor at Focus on the Family Singa-

pore, said couples often say that their complementarity in personalities, values, future aspirations and outlook on life are key factors for their choice of partner, rather than their educational levels.

Patricia said the older generation cares a lot more about a woman marrying up, but not the younger crowd. While her wealthy parents did not explicitly object to her marriage, she could sense their concerns about the disparity in the couple's socio-economic back-

Educational levels of brides and grooms



grounds. But in the end, they gave their blessings.

She said: "I made it very clear to

my parents that this is the guy I want to marry."

Their socio-economic status dif-

ferences do not bother her husband, she said.

"He is confident and not someone who really cares what others think of him. People always say he is so lucky to have met me, but they don't know his worth," she said, adding that her husband is pursuing a degree in psychology.

They split the household bills 50-50, but Patricia says she would not mind paying a larger share, such as for their future children's education, as she earns more.

"The most important thing in a successful marriage is respect and communication - which is far more important than socio-economic status. And respect is earned, it is not a given," she said.

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