al credentials find it easier to get a satisfying and financially rewarding job.

The data in Table 3 show that education is positively associated with the rate of labor force participation before marriage in Colombia and Guatemala, and even more strongly after marriage in all three countries. The data also indicate that, among those who worked before marriage, better educated women were more likely than less educated women to have kept their wages for themselves, which suggests that education enhances women's control over their own incomes.

Mediating Influences

Table 4 provides the results of the multivariate analysis. The regression coefficients confirm that a woman's schooling influences marital fertility not only independently from her husband's education, but also more strongly. Most of the variables included in the model have a significant effect on cumulative fertility. However, contrary to expectations, the indicators of knowledge show a relatively weak impact on children ever born. The only statistically significant negative coefficients correspond to exposure to mass media (in Ecuador) and to understanding the ovulatory cycle (in Colombia). By contrast, the indicators of socioeconomic status display a strong negative influence on fertility in the three countries examined. The same applies for attitudes, as measured by the early use of contraception. The regression analysis also confirms that older age at first birth and the absence of a premarital birth are conducive to lower fertility. The results are less conclusive regarding the effect of union type. Women in consensual unions display lower fertility only in the case of Guatemala. Concerning women's employment histories, only work activity after marriage appears to have a significant negative effect on marital fertility.

The comparison of Model I (unadjusted) and Model II (adjusted) reveals that the magnitude of the regression coefficients for women's education is considerably reduced after controls are applied, suggesting a relevant mediating effect of the cognitive, economic and attitudinal factors considered, as well as of women's family formation and working paths. However, the coefficients for women's education retained their statistical significance in the multivariate model (except for the higher educational categories in Guatemala). This probably occurred because of the imperfect measurement of the constructs employed, but it may also imply that the effect of education goes beyond the pathways hypothesized.

Discussion and Conclusions

Although fertility differentials by education have narrowed in Latin America over the past decade, childbearing patterns among the various educational strata remain disparate, resulting in the coexistence of different fertility regimes within the same society. Our analysis shows that reproductive preferences do not differ much among educational groups, whereas contraceptive behavior differs widely.

Our analysis responds to two key questions—how do the sequelae of early schooling hold throughout adulthood and influence lifetime fertility; and why does schooling, which rarely addresses issues directly relevant to sexual, reproductive and contraceptive behavior, influence women's childbearing patterns so decisively? The educational experience has long-lasting implications for women's lives because education serves as a source of knowledge and cognitive skills; as a resource that enhances economic opportunities and social mobility; and as a socialization process that shapes attitudes, values and aspirations.

The divergence in cognitive, economic and normative assets presumably explains why poorly educated and better educated women lead such different lives. Education also conditions women's choices in the domains of family and work. Since education has such a pervasive effect in shaping the whole spectrum of women's roles, reproductive behavior obviously cannot elude its influence.

Despite the centrality of education in demographic analysis, its significance for women's lives tends to be taken for granted. Also, too little attention has been paid to relevant debates within the sociology of education on the role of the school in individual and social change. In traditional educational theories, a tacit faith in meritocracy shaped the central theme—the value of education for social mobility. The new sociology of education emerged in the early 1970s as a critical response. Challenges the assumption of political neutrality, the proponents of the new sociology of education exposed the complicity of the school system in perpetuating and legitimizing social inequality. Going beyond the notion of schools as mere instruction-