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What men really want: Study shows intelligence climbing the list of important characteristics in a mate

By AMBER DINENNA / DoOver.com

Most women assume that a man's first concern when meeting a woman is her looks. Most men even loudly proclaim that they want to hook up with a "hot" woman: long legs that don't end, a toned physique and a face that makes all heads turn. But is this truly what men look for in a woman, or is it just a superficial first impression that is doomed to go nowhere?

According to a 2009 study done by the University of Iowa, men are increasingly becoming more interested in a woman who is educated, intelligent and financially stable, as opposed to simply beautiful.

This study has been conducted every decade since 1939, and the results have seen interesting changes over the years. The study questions men on 18 different traits found in a potential mate and asks them to rank them in importance from "essential" all the way to "irrelevant" characteristics.

In the most recent study, good looks, of course, ranked high on the list (as is assumed by popular opinion), but interestingly, this was not ranked as an essential characteristic. The study found that men ranked the following as essential characteristics: mutual love and attraction, dependable character and emotional stability. Men ranked the following as less but still important: education and intelligence, good looks and ambition.

From the time the study started in 1939 to the latest results collected in 2008, the importance of desirable traits in a partner have changed. The latest results ranked "mutual love and respect" as the number-one most important trait; this wasn't even in the top three in 1939. Men most recently ranked intelligence as the fourth most important trait, which is higher than its eleventh place ranking in 1939.

Christine Whelan, the author of "Marry Smart: The Intelligent Woman's Guide to True Love" concludes that men participating in this study have grown up with educated women in their lives - including mothers, teachers and role models - which has impacted the importance that modern men now place on a woman's mind, not just her looks.

One last significant shift in the importance of traits in a mate is the value of chastity. In 1939, this was valued higher than intelligence, but in the most recent results, chastity ranked lowest on the list, under unimportant characteristics. This is a concrete reflection of how relationships and dating have changed over the past few decades, meaning men are more likely to have sexual relationships with the women they are dating and consequently are not as bothered by the sexual past of their potential mates.

So, ladies, remember: even though men will continue to be on the lookout for the most attractive woman in a room, they will also be conscious of her ability to hold an intelligent conversation.

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