

Woman seeks inferior man

(if she knows what's good for her)

According to evolutionary theory, heterosexual men and women generally look for similar things in a long-term partner but with some exceptions. Trivers's (1972) theory of parental investment, for example, suggests that women invest more resources in producing and raising offspring than men and so they place more 'market value' on signs that the male can support them in this in terms of wealth, social status and industriousness. Men, on the other hand, place greater market value on physical attractiveness and home-making ability.

There is some evidence to support Trivers's view that more attractive women tend to marry upwards in socioeconomic terms (hypergyny) and higher status males tend to marry women who are more physically attractive. Nevertheless, evolutionary psychologists recognise that the full picture is more complex than this. They may not,

however, have been prepared for the radical alternative offered by Linda Hirshman, a former trial lawyer and retired professor from Brandeis University, Massachusetts, who is well known for her writing on marriage and feminism. In her view, women should prioritise their careers over having babies.

In 2003-04, Hirshman followed up 41 highly educated and accomplished 'elite brides' who, in 1996, had announced their weddings in the *New York Times*. It might have been expected that these successful career women, now aged in their 40s, would have continued to build on their earlier progress in the workplace. Of the 80% she was able to trace, however, 90% had become mothers. Furthermore, Hirshman was 'shocked' to find only five still in full-time work. In her view, feminism had failed the very women best placed to benefit from it, leaving them with lives in

which they did not flourish and where their potential was lost. 'The real glass ceiling', says Hirshman, 'is at home.'

One antidote to career suicide for such women is surely to find a man who is egalitarian on the domestic and career front, but Hirshman is not optimistic about the likelihood of this. Instead, for future generations of women who want careers, motherhood and marriage, without the domestic rut and loss of status, she offers three rules:

- 1 Start to plan your career early. Study subjects that lead to well-paid work such as law, medicine or economics. Stay away from the arts and classics. (Hmmm. Where would she place psychology?)
- 2 Once in work, take it seriously and 'find the money' through good salaries and wise job changes. This is likely to ensure that you do not have inferior earning power compared to men.
- 3 If you want children, have just one. It is more financially manageable.

One simple solution to all of this, for the woman who wants to have it all, is to marry beneath her, preferably a younger man, whose career prospects are not as good as her own. A struggling artist is ideal. He is less likely to challenge his wife's earning power and so is more likely to accept a domestic, househusband role, enabling his wife to carry on climbing the career ladder. What would evolutionary psychologists make of that?

Incidentally, the controversy that Hirshman has caused has earned her seventy-seventh place on a list compiled by the award-winning broadcast journalist Bernard Goldberg entitled '100 people who are screwing up America'. If you want to read more of Hirshman's writings, search in *The American Prospect Online* at www.prospect.org. Vitriolic reactions to her views can be found very easily elsewhere.

Further reading

Trivers, R. L. (1972) 'Parental investment and sexual selection', in Campbell, B. (ed.) *Sexual Selection and the Descent of Man*, Aldine.

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